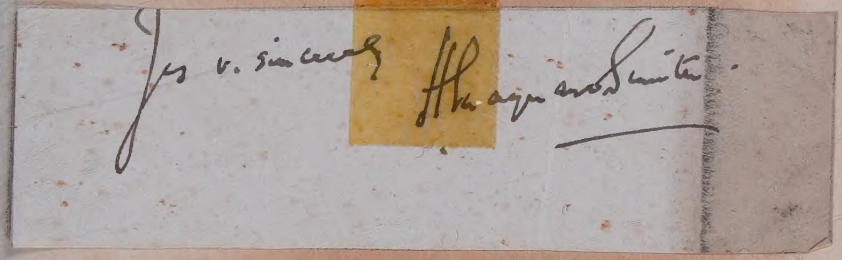
Inspector FROST in the City



INSPECTOR FROST IN THE CITY

By the same Author

INSPECTOR FROST'S JIGSAW

N.B.—All the characters in this book are fictitious

INSPECTOR FROST IN THE CITY

H. Maynard Smith

LONDON
ERNEST BENN LIMITED

First Published in
1 9 3 0
Printed
in
Great Britain

CONTENTS

		Page
	PART ONE	
Tuesday	. . . . .	7
	PART TWO	
Wednesday	. . . . .	45
	PART THREE	
Thursday	. . . . .	81
	PART FOUR	
Friday .	. . . . .	107
	PART FIVE	
Saturday	. . . . .	145
	PART SIX	
Sunday	. . . . .	174
	PART SEVEN	
Monday	. . . . .	203

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_KU-357-641

PART ONE

Tuesday

CHAPTER I

As I entered the Bank Street Police Station in the City, Station Sergeant Boston looked up and said:

"Hullo! Frost! So here you are at last!"

"It is not twenty-five minutes since your message came through to the Yard. How fast do you think a taxi travels? You can now fire away and tell me all about it."

"Perhaps it would be best if we had in Constable Johnson who discovered the body. It will save time."

Constable Johnson was young, he looked intelligent, and was perhaps just a little over-anxious to impress me favourably.

At five minutes past six that morning he had turned up Bolter's Court and discovered a body lying face downwards with a knife sticking in the back. Bending over him was a young man.

"How was the body lying?"

"With its feet towards the entry of the street."

"What sort of knife?"

"An old-fashioned knife, sir, with an elaborate handle."

"Thank you. What did the young man say?"

"He said, scornful like: 'So this is the best policed city in the world, is it? This guy won't boost you much, when he turns up unexpectedly in heaven.'"

"An American! What did you say?"

"I told him that he would have to come with me to the Station. Then he said, 'Heavens, man, you don't think I did it?'"

"I said: 'Anything that you say may be used in evidence against you.' He said: 'I'm an American citizen'—and he put his hand in his pocket.

"I said: 'But this ain't Chicago, so you'll have to come along with me.' By this time two constables had answered my whistle, and one of them came here for the ambulance."

"You made sure he was dead?"

"Dead and cold—I was in the War, sir. I know when a man is dead.

"Well, sir, when we lifted the man on to the ambulance a big wallet fell from his pocket. The American was on to it like a knife, but I snatched it. Some visiting cards fell out and the American got one of them. He said 'Gee-Whiz' three times over. He didn't say another word until we reached the Station."

"Now," said I, "it is for the sergeant to take up the story."

"Would you like to see the body?"

"No! the dead can wait. It's the living we are after. I want to know about this American. What's he like?"

"He's a youngish man. I should say thirty-five—about that, anyway. He was beautifully dressed—and I didn't notice a trace of an American accent." Here the Station Sergeant looked at Constable Johnson sharply.

"Quite right, sir. I noticed he talked differently in here. But if you remember, sir, he called you captain. He might have been an English gentleman, if——"

"If what?"

"If all his things hadn't been quite new. From his hat to his boots he looked as if he had just come from a shop."

"Rather a flash man?"

"No, sir. I know how a real swell dresses. He might have been dressed for Goodwood—only—— Well, I could not help noticing—everything about him was new."

"And what did you infer from that?"

P. C. Johnson hesitated. Then he said: "Nothing sir. It ain't for me to do that. I'm telling you what I saw."

"Quite right, Johnson—Now, you Sergeant tell me what this young fashion plate said."

"He gave his name as Edward van Storck. He said that this was his first visit to London, that as he could not see the City in daytime, he had got up

early in the morning to have a look round when all was quiet. He had looked down Bolter's Court and discovered the body a minute before the constable turned up. He had no card about him, but he gave his address at the Ritz, and pulled a key with a label out of his pocket and said: 'Room 54'.

"He said he was well known at the Embassy. I asked him if he could identify the body. He said: 'No, but everyone knows who Mckinley M. Macmillan was.' That was the name on the card. I said: 'I didn't.' He said the Embassy people would give all information. It was what they were there for. It was not any concern of his, and he did not want to be mixed up in the matter. I told him he would have to give evidence at the inquest. He said it would be a damned nuisance, and that the officer—that's Johnson—had seen all he had. He wanted to go—'wanted his breakfast' was what he said—and so he had a taxi—the number was 1507. He told the man to drive him to the Ritz."

"That's that! Well, if that is all you know about the American, let us now get on to the murdered man."

Sergeant Boston took me to the mortuary, and showed me the corpse. It was that of a fair-haired man in the thirties. Even in death his face was unpleasant, and the Police Surgeon was of opinion that he had strained a splendid constitution by living too fast. He had been clothed in cheap but new clothes bought from a well-known firm in the

Tottenham Court Road, and his underclothing had no marks upon it. He had in his pockets a wallet which contained the visiting cards of Mckinley M. Macmillan, Knickerbocker Club, a receipted bill from a Paris hotel, and a letter written in script beginning "Darling Mac" and ending "Your loving Lizzie."

He had also on him a cheap watch, a cheap automatic pistol, and one shilling and five coppers. Finally, and most important, was a small brown paper parcel which contained £500 in Bank of England notes.

CHAPTER II

HAVING viewed the body and other exhibits, I jumped into a taxi and went straight to the American Embassy, and was soon face to face with a young secretary, who was not in the least diplomatic, and was only in process of learning how to manage a monocle.

"It is my duty to inform you that a murder has been committed. A man, presumed to be an American citizen, was found stabbed in the back just inside Bolter's Court this morning shortly after six. Scotland Yard wants to discover the man's antecedents, and would be obliged if someone from the Embassy could identify the corpse."

"What's his name?"

"His visiting cards bear the name of Mckinley M. Macmillan, of the Knickerbocker Club, New York, and——"

"What—the Triple Mac! Dead! Good Heavens! You are sure he is dead?"

"The man we picked up is certainly dead."

"Mac dead! Heavens! Is it in the papers?"

"It will be in all the mid-day editions."

"Of course! Just excuse me a minute. I—I must acquaint His Excellency."

With that the young man rushed from the room, and in his haste did not quite close the door, to which I naturally approached. I soon heard an excited voice over the telephone in an adjoining room: "Sefton Hall speaking. Sell World's Amalgams, all I hold—Yes—at once—Why? Sorry I can't tell you." He was soon on to another number: "Sefton Hall speaking. Sell World's Amalgams—Yes! Do it and don't be a damned fool—I know." Another number: "Sefton Hall speaking. Sell World's Amalgams. You silly girl! Get up at once and call up your broker. It must be done before 10 o'clock. No, sorry, I can't lunch with you. You will know all about it by lunch time."

When Mr. Sefton Hall re-entered the room he still looked excited, and he found me sitting on the same chair, twirling my hat.

"His Excellency," said the young liar, "is shocked to hear of Mr. Macmillan's death. Mr. Macmillan, sir, was a great American citizen."

"Then perhaps someone from the Embassy will come and identify the body. You knew him?"

"No! I didn't. I don't know anyone who did know Macmillan except Tony Stanford, and he is in New York."

"You can at least tell me about him."

"Of course! His father was of the Middle West. He made money, lots of it, and did not give any away. He only had one boy, and he put him into an office in Chicago when he was fourteen. When

sixteen the boy was a Drummer on the road. When twenty-two, old man Macmillan died, and Mckinley M. inherited some ten million dollars. That's the yarn, everybody knows."

"A fortunate young man."

"I suppose so, but nobody knows except Tony Stanford. Tony was of my semester at Harvard, and was going to be our great noise in classics. Heaven knows how he picked up Macmillan. Anyhow the Triple Mac took him into partnership and installed him in New York. Everyone knows Tony, but nobody gets much out of him."

"But what of Mr. Macmillan?"

"Oh that's what's odd. The Triple Mac—everyone calls him that—lived on in some God forsaken town in the Middle West. It was the business that moved, and moved round the world. Mac did not go on adding one to one like his Pa. He went straight into big business, and nobody knows how many millions he commands. His interests everywhere are colossal."

"A great many people must know him."

"I doubt it. Reporters don't cut much ice when they try to get Mac. I suppose he attends his Boards from time to time, but Tony does the show business, and Tony doesn't tell! Not much!"

"You can at least tell me Mr. Macmillan's interests."

"I suppose even you have heard of the World's Amalgamated Steel Trust. Well that's Macmillan.

Did you hear of that Revolution in the State of Bastoria? Well—that was Mac again. Some Dago General became President, and Mac lapped up all the oil. Who financed that Chinese General some two years ago and upset your apple cart in the Far East? Well, they do say that was Mac. You can't prove it, but there is little doubt about his profits. Bless you! Nobody knows where Mac will break out next. He is always upsetting some established market or making more millions where nobody thought a red cent was to be found. He can't be much over thirty and he has the big wigs beat to a frazzle."

"Do you really suppose that the man in cheap ready-made clothes who has been murdered can really be this daring financier?"

"It doesn't sound likely, but then Mac is a bit unexpected. Your story isn't likely anyhow. A man in a store-made suit doesn't often walk about with all those dollars on him, and a murderer who sticks a man with a big wad of bills in his pockets doesn't generally leave them there."

"That's true! You have, then, no suggestion to offer about the dead man, but can you tell me anything of the young American who first found him, Mr. Edward van Storck?"

"What, Teddy van Storck! Rather! Why everyone knows him. Teddy's international! He's as well known in Paris and London as in New York and Newport."

"Well, a gentleman giving that name was on the spot when the constable came upon the body. He referred us to the Embassy for information about himself."

"I didn't know he was over here. Where is he? at the Ritz? That's his usual place."

"That is the address he gave. Can you tell me anything about him?"

"Teddy is just it. He knows everybody. He has been everywhere. He sets the fashion wherever he goes. He's a real bright American, and Society just hums when he turns up. Even Cowes sat up and took notice when he arrived in his steam yacht."

"He had, I presume, no connexion with Mr. Macmillan."

"Not likely! I can't imagine Teddy, with the Devil's own impudence, adding Mckinley M. Macmillan to his collection of curios."

"He has, then, unlikely friends."

"He makes a side line in eccentricities. He is rich enough to afford a luxury of that sort, but I think he prefers Grand Duchesses."

CHAPTER III

It was nine o'clock when I returned from the Embassy to the Yard and had an interview with the Chief. First of all we drafted an account to be delivered to the Press, containing all that we knew except the letter beginning "Darling Mac." Next we sent a man to Paris by the 10 o'clock train with the receipt to see if the hotel could furnish any particulars.

Then a man was despatched to trace the Bank of England notes, and lastly, I persuaded the Chief to send my godson, Detective Smith, to the City to keep his eyes on Bolter's Court.

Having settled these preliminaries, I went to the Ritz Hotel and asked for Mr. van Storck.

"Mr. van Storck is not here," said the concierge.

"Room 54," I suggested.

The Manager, who was passing, stopped. He knew me of old, and hated to see me in the hotel, for, as he said, I always meant trouble.

"No, Mr. van Storck is not here. Room 54 indeed! Mr. van Storck always has the same suite. We might almost say that it was reserved for him. He was here for some weeks last season. The ball

he gave was somewhat of a sensation. It had fewer people and cost more money than any entertainment I can remember. The mob are not invited, and the gate crasher has a poor chance when Mr. van Storck gives a party."

"Do you know if he is in England?"

"No! They may know at the office if he is expected."

They didn't, but a page boy who had been listening after the manner of his kind, here volunteered the intelligence that a gentleman had arrived before 8 o'clock in a taxi and asked for Mr. van Storck.

"Did he go back in the taxi?"

"No! He asked me the way to the Restaurant."

"Yes, I know. Then he went out into Piccadilly. Would you know him again?"

"I think so."

"What was he like?"

"He was a gentleman, anyone could see that."

"You mean he gave you half a crown."

The boy blushed, and I continued: "Do you know Mr. van Storck?"

"No, sir, I haven't been here long. But he couldn't have been Mr. van Storck, for he asked for him. Then he laughed and said: 'Poor old Teddy!'"

"Well," said I, turning to the manager, "I am afraid you will have to answer a good many inquiries

for Mr. van Storck before the day is over. Good-bye."

As I was going out I saw Mr. Sefton Hall coming in. He did not see me, but marched straight to the office and I heard him say: "Mr. van Storck?"

CHAPTER IV

I WENT out of the Ritz very annoyed with Station Sergeant Boston. Why hadn't he kept the American until he was identified by the Embassy. He seemed right in supposing that the American could not have done the deed, but men who give a false name and address are likely to be suspected.

It was probable that he had only done so to avoid the inquest and being mixed up with a horrible crime, but the Police Force don't like to be outwitted, and I did not mean that he should succeed. I therefore turned into the Green Park and took a seat for consideration.

The man was evidently an American and he was very well turned out. He gave Johnson the idea of having everything new. Now there are many good tailors in London, in and outside Savile Row, but there are only one or two firms that are known to rich Americans. I rose from the seat, and walked to Mr. Lake's, showed my card and asked to see him.

Mr. Lake has beautiful manners—an ingratiating deference without a trace of servility. He never disagrees with anyone, and only hints at sartorial improvements. Most men, who can afford to do so,

leave themselves entirely in his hands, and he fashions them according to his sovereign pleasure. He does not make my clothes—that goes without saying—but I had known him some time, ever since a bogus Polish Count, who went everywhere for one season, contrived to exploit the more fashionable shops of Mayfair, and disappeared with a complete kit for big game shooting in Central Africa. It was a sad morning when Duchesses awoke to the fact that they did not really know who he was, when the secretary of the Turf Club sought for the gentleman who had introduced him as an honorary member, when jewellers asked tailors how it was they had allowed him so much credit. Then everybody blamed Lord Hayman, who had met the charming fellow at the Jockey Club in Paris, although it turned out that he was not a member; and, lastly, everyone blamed the police because we could not trace him. Perhaps the big game ate him in Central Africa.

"Well, Mr. Lake, I have come to consult you about what I fear is a case of impersonation."

"What? Another Polish Count?"

"Not that I know of. Do you know a Mr. van Storck?"

"Certainly! Mr. van Storck is, if I may say so, one of my most valued clients."

"He is not, so far as you are aware, in England."

"Not yet. The Spring has only just begun. Mr. van Storck may be expected shortly. You see

Inspector, that in this wicked world and in our climate, a man is bound to wear clothes, and they can't make them anywhere but in London. Mr. van Storck is not likely to order clothes without a personal consultation with us. He will come all right in the next week or so, even if he returns home by the next boat. You, however, can't want Mr. van Storck."

"I want a well-dressed American who gave Mr. van Storck's name at a police station this morning, and who cannot be traced."

"Mr. van Storck," said Mr. Lake, "can always be traced in the fashionable intelligence."

"I see! Now I should like to know if you have had recently a new American customer?"

"Yes! Mr. Bolton. He came to us about ten days ago."

"He gave you a large order?"

"A considerable order," said Mr. Lake. "He is staying at Claridge's, I think. Wait a moment."

Mr. Lake went out and returned in a couple of minutes. "Yes, Claridge's, Room 54."

"Thank you. How was he dressed when you took him in hand?"

"Not so badly for a man who had bought his clothes in Paris."

"Was he introduced to you?"

"No! but we made discreet inquiries of the Paris firm. The answers were entirely satisfactory."

"Has he paid you?"

"Yes, by cheque on a Paris Bank—I forget which. I remember the fact because he called our attention to a small discrepancy in our account owing to our ignorance of the recent fluctuations in the rate of exchange. It was only a matter of shillings."

"Evidently a good man of business."

"Yes! he took all the discount for cash to which he was entitled. Some Americans are so strange."

"Does Mr. van Storck also pay cash?"

"No! but he pays, and asks for no discount." Mr. Lake paused, and then added with a burst of enthusiasm: "But we should supply Mr. van Storck whether he paid or not. You will understand that—dressed by us—he is a splendid advertisement."

CHAPTER V

I DID not go at once to Claridge's, but took a taxi into the City to pick up Sergeant Boston, as I wanted to identify the man. It was close on two o'clock when we arrived at the hotel and asked for Mr. Bolton.

We were at once told that Mr. Bolton had left the hotel at half-past nine, stating that he might be away for at least a week. He had retained his rooms, for which he had paid in advance, and left his valet behind him. Would we like to see the valet?

We said we should, and were, in consequence, shown up into Mr. Bolton's suite. A minute afterwards the door opened, and who should come in but my old friend, Mr. Brown. Four years before I had been instrumental in sending Mr. Brown to Dartmoor.

"How do you do, Brown, or ought I to call you by another name?"

"My name is still Brown, sir."

"How long have you been out of Dartmoor?"

"Six months, sir; and I am trying to earn an honest living."

"Glad to hear it! And how did you obtain your present position?"

"I answered an advertisement. I was quite honest, sir, with Mr. Bolton. I told him how I had been led into temptation by betting, and how I had sold that little cream jug of Sir Walter Gerrans."

"And what did Mr. Bolton say?"

"He said he did not want to be my Father Confessor. He wanted a valet who knew his job; and if I stole from him he'd murder me. Mr. Bolton is a pleasant spoken gentleman."

"I am longing to make his acquaintance. Do you know where he is?"

"No, sir. He went away this morning, and told me to remain here until I heard from him or until he returned."

"Can you tell me what he did before he went away?"

"Well, sir, I don't know if I ought in my position."

"As you like—I don't know, however, if I ought not to say something about you downstairs."

"O, sir, please don't do that. I am trying to lead an honest life."

"Well, then, tell me about Mr. Bolton's movements."

"When I went to call him this morning I found he was already up and had gone out. I don't know where he went or anything about it. He came in

about half-past eight and had his breakfast. While he was having breakfast he asked for a Bradshaw and cable forms. He took so long over that cable, looking again and again into a little book, that his breakfast must have got quite cold."

"Then he sent you out to the Post Office?"

"No, he didn't, sir. When he had the cable apparently to his mind, he tore up the half dozen forms he had spoiled and burnt them. He put the last one into his pocket. No doubt, he meant to send it himself. Then he went and changed his clothes and packed the old suit case he had when he arrived here."

"He packed it—not you?"

"Yes, sir! These American gentlemen don't seem to know what a man is for. Anyhow he packed it himself and sent me for a taxi. He said 'Victoria' when he got into the cab."

"Mr. Bolton, I think, had a lot of new clothes recently from Lake's. What did he do with the old ones?"

"He gave them to me."

"You sold them?"

"Yes! The prices were bad. They said they were Frenchified."

"I see, that's all I want to know at present. Mind you keep straight. That's all."

When we returned to the taxi, Sergeant Boston asked me: "Why didn't you make him get back

some of the clothes, that we might find out who made 'em and for whom?"

"Because Lake knows the firm already. Besides, you ought not to tempt a man to betray his master—at least not more than is necessary"

CHAPTER VI

BEING a persistent person, I went back to the American Embassy and asked for Mr. Sefton Hall.

"Hullo! Inspector," said that young man as he entered the room, "I think you've been had."

"Indeed," said I.

"Teddy van Storck isn't at the Ritz. Somebody has been pulling your leg."

"I had discovered that before I saw you coming into the hotel. We both went to find him there, and we were both deceived. I didn't know his habits. You did."

"Well, all the information I can give you is from an American paper. A few weeks back he was at Palm Beach, Florida."

"Do you know a Mr. R. H. Bolton?"

"Bolton! Bolton! Yes, I do. There was a man of that name at Deauville last fall. Teddy van Storck introduced him to me."

"What do you know about him?"

"Not much, but he was a friend of Teddy's, so he is sure to be all right."

"I have reason to believe that he was the man who used Mr. van Storck's name at the Police Station this morning."

"The devil he did! That was pretty good cheek! Did you find him at the Ritz?"

"No! he has rooms at Claridge's."

"You've tracked him down?"

"No! he left the hotel at 9.30 for Victoria."

"And is now nearing Paris. I wish I were with him."

"What you suggest is possible. Meantime, Scotland Yard wants to know more about him."

"He is a nice, pleasant chap. Everyone liked him at Deauville—and as a poker player he would be hard to beat."

"You don't know where he came from, or his connexions?"

"No! I am not a policeman, and I was not on duty. You can't catechise an hotel acquaintance."

"Will the Embassy keep us informed?"

"Certainly! And, I say! Are you quite sure you have the corpse of Mckinley M. Macmillan?"

"No! Far from it. Scotland Yard has published such facts as it knows. It can't do more."

"If you look at the tape you will see that prices are falling like billy-o on the Exchange. Tomorrow we shall read of blue ruin on Wall Street; and you will be responsible if in the end the Triple Mac turns out to be alive."

"Excuse me, sir," I replied with dignity, "Scotland Yard can only publish such facts as it knows. It is no fault of theirs if there is no one at the American Embassy who can identify one of its most prominent citizens, or give any trustworthy evidence concerning him."

CHAPTER VII

When I returned to the Yard and made my report the Chief was quite nasty. "You have been wasting your time running up a side track. It's quite obvious that the young man didn't wish to be mixed up in the case, and so gave the name of a friend in New York and then returned to Paris. When he is wanted he won't be difficult to find—that is—if he is worth finding, which I doubt."

"Well, I'm not satisfied. This Bolton is no college boy over here on his first trip and wanting to see everything in his guide book. What was he really doing in the City at 6 a.m.? That's what I want to know, and I suggest that we wire to the Sûreté for more information."

"All right! As you like, but I hope that to-morrow you will turn your attention to this stiletto, or dagger, or whatever it is. I've seen it. It's curious."

"Yes! It might have come from a Museum, and therefore we can't argue from it any particular kind of dago."

"The letter found on the man strikes me as even more interesting."

"It had no date or address, and was written on cheap paper. We shan't get on to Lizzie until we know more of the man's recent environment. He will probably be identified to-morrow by some hotel concierge, or more probably by some lodging-house keeper."

"Then there is the scene of the murder."

"Detective Smith is there under my instructions, and will report to me this evening."

"I am not sure that you do not put too much faith in that young man. He thinks too well of himself. I shouldn't be surprised if he had expected being made a sergeant when Robinson was promoted."

"Well, sir, he deserved it, and I hope you won't overlook him if he makes good in this case."

"I make no promises. What are you up to next?"

"It is five o'clock, and I am going home to tea. There is nothing more to be done to-day, except to talk the matter over with Detective Smith."

"Do you think he will be helpful?"

"I find it clears my mind to discuss a problem with one who is not my superior."

"Inspector, you are incorrigible."

"Well, well, you understand, sir. If anything requiring emergency action is discovered I can be rung up at Lavender Gardens, Brixton."

CHAPTER VIII

BILLY SMITH came to supper, but during that meal no word was said about the murder. My wife, who is a lady and on the parish council of her Church, pretends to ignore my detestable occupation. To our neighbours, I am, like them—vaguely—something in the City. They do not connect me with the famous Inspector they read about in the *Daily Intelligence*. You see we are the Austin-Frosts in Brixton. I am plain Frost in the Yard.

After supper we listened on the wireless to the news, and learnt that a depression was extending from Iceland. Then Billy and my youngest daughter tried a duet. Afterwards we had our family game at bridge, and at 10.15, to the minute, the ladies said good-night—my wife adjuring me not to be late, and to put up the chain after Billy had gone.

"Now, Billy," I said, "to our muttons. Listen attentively, and I will tell you how I spent my day. The Chief says I have been wasting my time."

"He would, sir, that's what he's there for. You'll say, I've wasted my time presently. Aren't you an inspector and I a humble detective. That's what

you are there for. But before we begin may I have a drink?"

"Beware of alcoholism, Billy. There is no knowing but this old country, with a Flapper vote, mayn't go dry."

"Then every Speak-easy will be a gold mine to us."

"Billy, I'm ashamed of you."

But Billy was not ashamed of filling his glass and squirting some of the soda water on to the table. We mopped it up with our handkerchiefs, and hoped that my wife would not notice it in the morning—a forlorn hope, I knew by experience. Then I started, Billy smoked, smiled and said nothing. When I had finished, I filled my glass and remarked: "Now, Billy, it is your turn. How have you wasted your time?"

"I went straight to the Station and saw the exhibits—including the body. The dagger is a jolly nice piece of thin steel with a heavy haft—looked as if it was hundreds of years old. I wonder why the chap who did the deed left it behind him—a sort of family heirloom, don't you know? I also made a copy of the letter, which we will discuss presently. It is written in what they call 'script', and not very easily. Lizzie was either a girl who had left her elementary school some time and not done much writing since, or she had a handwriting of her own and was not accustomed to script. But we will discuss that later.

"Next I saw P. C. Johnson—a bright lad that! I gather that the body was lying face downwards, some ten feet from the entrance, and that his head was towards the end of the court. So it looks as if the man was going in when he was struck. The murderer must have been following him, and probably threw the knife from the entrance to the passage.

"Next I saw the corpse—not an attractive fellow. I decided against his being Mckinley M. Macmillan."

"Why?"

"The chap may have been crafty, but he hadn't the head to pull off big things which the papers say Master Macmillan did."

"The aptitude for making money is a thing of itself. Men have made millions who were of no great intelligence."

"At any rate they had guts. This chap looks as if he had been a sneak."

"Well, go on."

"Next I went to Bolter's Court. It's a narrow dark passage which you might easily pass without noticing. It leads into a flagged court with no outlet at the other end. There is no reason why anyone should go up it unless on business. There is a tobacconist at the corner facing the street on one side and a boot shop on the other. Blank walls in the passage, and one fine old house in the court itself—a nest of offices. I went to have a look at

the names inside the door. They did not seem at first interesting, but then I saw Mr. Festonen, timber merchant, agent for firms in Norway, Sweden, Helsingfors and Riga. It was the word Riga that struck me. Tut, tut, I said, here we are—a good old Bolshi plot."

"Bolshi plots," said I, "are dealt with the other side of the Yard."

"For once," said Billy, "the men on the other side of the Yard may be useful. We need not despair even of them."

"Go on! You seem altogether irrelevant."

"Have you ever noted," said Billy, "how badly the City of London is provided with pubs?"

"No! What the dickens has that to do with it?"

"Why it is possible to loaf all day outside a pub without exciting remark, but even a woman with a perambulator can't stand all day looking into a linen draper's. It was when the papers came out with headlines later on, that a sensation loving public just trooped along in the lunch hour to see where a murder had been committed."

"Did anyone like the murderer come along? They say murderers can't keep away from the scene of their crime."

"Can't tell you that! Nobody confessed to me: 'It's here I did it.' My mind, you see, was running on Mr. Festonen. Was Mckinley M. going to pay him an evening call? Just about one o'clock a tall,

big boned man, with fair hair and rather bulging blue eyes, came out of the offices and passed out of the Court. My prophetic soul knew that it was Mr. Festonen. I waited a few minutes, and then ran up the four flights of stairs to the door with the gentleman's name painted on it in black letters. It was locked, so I rang the bell, and the door was opened by a little, dark, middle-aged man. I will bet my boots he is a Russian! Said I: 'Is Mr. Festonen in?' 'No, sir, he has just gone out to lunch. No! I don't know when he will be back. Will you leave a message?' I said, 'Oh no, thanks—it doesn't matter. I only just looked in to see if he had been upset about the murder.' I don't think my little dark friend was quite comfortable. His eyes were watchful—what do you call it—intent. Then I made a shot, 'I knew, of course, that Mr. Festonen often came back here and worked quite late.' The shot went home all right. My little friend was rattled. So I went on: 'Sorry to have troubled you. Just tell Mr. Festonen I called.'

"'What name shall I say, sir, he asked. 'William Smith,' said I, and trotted down the court and turned into the dark tobacconist's shop to buy a packet of fags.

"You can linger in a tobacconist's for a bit, just to open the packet, then to fill your cigarette case, then to choose one, then to light it—all the time exchanging the time of day with the young woman behind the counter. I hadn't finished when my

Russian clerk—I told you he was a Russian, remember—came shuffling down the court and out into the street. Naturally I followed on the other side of the road. He went into an A.B.C. shop, and a minute afterwards out he came with Mr. Festonen, and both were talking excitedly. You know how foreigners talk. That pair have the wind up all right."

"When you want to catch a criminal, it is not wise to put him on his guard."

"Oh! Festonen did not murder the man," said Billy. "No man who kills his enemy in cold blood does it on his own doorstep. Besides, if Festonen had done it, the corpse would have been lying the other way on. What we have to discover is why Mckinley M. was going to visit Mr. Festonen—when we have discovered that, the motive of the crime will be clear."

"It is a guess on your part that the murdered man was going to Festonen. It is much more probable that he saw his enemy coming, and dodged into the first passage he came to, hoping to escape."

"If I found myself followed by an enemy on a dark night, I should get into the middle of the road and shout 'Police'."

"What's the chance of your being heard in a deserted City?"

"Small—but I wasn't thinking of that. I was thinking that the other chap would certainly run away."

"Hum! Everyone is not so clever as you! Go on!"

"Festonen and his clerk went hurrying back to their office, and I thought the time had come for a little lunch. So I went into the A.B.C. shop and there was an old gentleman with a white beard and horn rimmed spectacles. He was sitting at a square, marble-topped table with a roll and a cup of coffee beside him. At the same table was a plate with a half-eaten roll and an almost untasted cup of coffee. I sat down at the next table and ordered a poached egg, and noted that the old gentleman was not so interested in his food as in his newspapers—he was reading about the Macmillan murder.

"I waited a bit and then turned to the old gentleman and said: 'Do you mind my having a glance at the paper you are not reading?' The old gentleman turned and grunted something which I took for permission. Having read the *Evening Sentinel* for a minute or so, I returned it saying: 'A very strange case, sir.' 'What case?' said he. 'This Macmillan case,' said I. 'I thought you were reading it.'

"The old gentleman glared at me for quite a long time before he said: 'It's monstrous that such a crime should be committed in the City of London, and no credit to the Metropolitan police.'

"'Oh,' said I, 'they'll discover all about it.'

"'What makes you think that?'

"'Because the man was a multi-millionaire. There are too many people interested in multi-millionaires for anything about them to remain hid.' 'Oh, that's what you think,' said the old gent contemptuously, as he recovered his newspaper and went to the desk to pay his bill.

"I was not long after him, but he hailed a passing taxi and was gone. I have the number of the taxi, and I shall know to-morrow where he went."

"And after that," I inquired.

"There was no after that. Nothing happened after that up to five o'clock, when I came away and P. C. Johnson took on the court as the City emptied. I put him up to watching Mr. Festonen."

"Billy," I said, "I don't think you have discovered much information of value. What does it boil down to? There is an alien carrying on a perfectly legitimate business in Bolter's Court, and there was an old gentleman in an A.B.C. shop who did not respond very heartily to your advances."

"Is that how the Chief treated your discoveries?"

"Possibly, but with less excuse," said I. "Now what do you make of the case?"

"First, the murdered man was certainly not Mckinley M. Macmillan."

"'Certainly,' suggests the cocksureness of youth, but I am inclined to agree with you."

"Secondly, I think Mr. Bolton will turn out to be the Triple Mac."

"Good heavens, Billy! You have been reading too many Tec. Stories!"

"Thirdly, I think the murdered man was going to visit Mr. Festonen."

"I have suggested a more probable explanation."

"Fourthly, I am sure that Mr. Festonen went to the A.B.C. shop to meet the old gentleman."

"There you are probably right."

"Lastly, the Russian clerk and the old gentleman were afraid of discussing the murder."

"Then why did he read two newspapers on the subject in a public place not a hundred yards from the crime? Now, Billy, I will tell you my conclusions. First, Mr. R. H. Bolton has not gone to Paris."

"Why?"

"Because Brown—we know he is a liar—emphasised the word *Victoria*, about which he had not been asked. Personally I believe Mr. Bolton will re-appear."

"Not likely, I should say."

"On the contrary. Even a very rich American would not keep on a suite at Claridge's unless he intended to return to them. Neither would he keep on Brown unless he had some use for him. Lastly, after coming to London to be dressed by Mr. Lake, he would not leave all those nice clothes behind."

"Well, now let's discuss the letter."

"Not to-night, Billy. My wife, as you know, likes me to keep respectable hours. Besides, after

the body has been identified—and it will be to-morrow, I expect—Lizzie's letter to Darling Mac will be more important. No! you don't want another drink. Mrs. Frost will look very carefully before breakfast to-morrow to see how much has gone from the decanter."

PART TWO

Wednesday

CHAPTER I

"ANY news?" I asked on arriving at the Yard next morning.

"Yes! Mr. Edward van Storck has cabled from New York to say where he is, the secretary of the Knickerbocker Club has cabled to say that Mr. Macmillan is not and never has been a member, and a Mr. Stanford has cabled that Mr. Macmillan is in Illinois, and that he has heard from him since his reputed murder. The sergeant who went to Paris has wired that he has accomplished his mission and is returning. The notes have been traced to a bank at Fulham, who issued them to a Mr. Stepanovich, who was leaving England. What next should be done?"

"Stepanovich," I muttered. "Well, Detective Smith had better go and interview the bank manager. Inquiries should be made on the political side about Stepanovich—and—yes—about Festonen, a timber merchant, in Bolter's Court. Somebody should be told off to watch my friend, Mr. Brown, and report on how he spends his leisure. I think I will take that stiletto round to the South Kensington Museum, and see if some expert can tell us anything about it.

I shall probably be back in an hour. The man from Paris won't be here before 5.30 this afternoon, and by then the Sûreté should have something to tell us about Bolton. I shall get back as soon as I can, for I expect someone will identify the body this morning. After that we may be busy. Anything in the papers?"

"The papers say that there was a panic in Wall Street when the news first came out, and very heavy selling. By the afternoon Mr. Stanford, Macmillan's partner, arrived, and the firm began to buy. Later Mr. Stanford published a statement that Mr. Macmillan was alive and well."

"Ah!" said I, "I expect a good many people, like my young friend, Sefton Hall, are wishing this morning that they had not been so precipitate."

CHAPTER II

THE expert at South Kensington was a very superior, middle-aged man, and his long thin nose seemed to twitch with irritability and disdain when he was suddenly confronted with a vulgar detective concerned with a low-class murder committed in the City. But when I produced the dagger his manner at once changed. He examined it carefully, he poised it in his long thin hands. Then, jumping up, he hurried me from his room without explanation, and we went from court to court until we came to the place reserved for armour and medieval weapons. He produced keys, opened cases, compared the dagger with others of like nature, and muttered again and again words that I took to be Italian.

At last, my patience being exhausted, I said: "I want to know about this dagger because a murder has been committed with it."

"Many murders, probably," sighed the expert.

"I am not concerned with others. All I want to know is: Can you tell me anything about this

dagger which may be useful in tracing the man who used it."

"Nothing," said he. "You may be surprised to hear that I have no connexion with the criminal classes. To-day most crimes seem to lack finesse, and they do not compensate for that by intensity of passion. This dagger, now, was made in Milan, almost certainly by —— (I forget the name he mentioned). It has probably been used in very peculiar tragedies, and to think of its being the weapon of a pick-pocket sticking a fat pork butcher of Chicago!"

"Pardon me," I said, "the murderer was not a pick-pocket; he left £500 and a cheap watch on his victim, and I have no evidence that the victim came from Chicago. Anyhow he was not fat."

"The details don't matter apart from the scare headlines in the evening paper. I hope you will at least have the decency to keep me out of the witness-box and my portrait out of the *Daily Intelligence*. It is too distressing. Here is a dagger which should be in that case; and I suppose that, when you've hanged the murderer, it will go to the Chamber of Horrors at Mme. Tussaud's."

"Do you mind writing out a short description of the dagger that may be used in tracing it?"

"You can hardly expect me to do that on the spur of the moment. I might make a mistake. I should

like first to show it to my friend, Mr. Sanders, the first authority in Europe on Italian armoury. If you leave it with me for a week or so, I could, no doubt, in a tentative way express an opinion."

"The inquest won't wait for that," I replied brusquely. "Where may Mr. Sanders be found? Perhaps he could give me the information at once."

"Mr. Sanders lives in Kensington Square. No! don't go away. No doubt I can get him over the telephone. If he be at home he could be here in ten minutes, and I should myself like to have his opinion."

So we went back to the expert's room. We found Mr. Sanders was at home and would come at once. This meant waiting a quarter of an hour, and all that time the expert fingered the dagger, and did not think me worthy of a remark.

Then the door opened and a cherubic little man with silky, silvery hair tripped into the room, gave a twitter of surprise and piped: "Yes! It's mine—Give it me. It's the Borgian dagger." He seized it with delight. He beamed on the expert, he beamed on me. "Whom am I to thank," he asked. "I offered £50 as a reward. I never thought that I should take it back to its cabinet."

"I am afraid, Mr. Sanders, you can't take it back

now. For the present it is in possession of the police."

"But it's mine," cried the little man in a high treble. "You don't seem to understand its importance. It was with this dagger that the Duke of Gandia was slain."

"I don't know, sir, who your Duke was; but I do know that this dagger killed the man who goes by the name of Mckinley M. Macmillan."

The old man looked at me with contempt. "You can hardly compare your sordid crime with one of the most mysterious events in history."

"I guess it's only mysterious because there was no Scotland Yard in those days. Now, sir, what would you have done supposing that someone had brought you that dagger on the morning after the Duke's murder."

"I don't know," said Mr. Sanders.

"I do," said the sardonic expert. "You'd have made for the nearest frontier, and not said anything until you were safe on the other side."

The old man tittered slightly.

"No wonder that murder remains a mystery," said I, "if people were like that—but that is not the way of Detective-Inspector Frost. My mystery will be cleared up."

"Then will the dagger be returned to me?"

"Not until after the trial. We shall take good care of it. Burglars don't break into Scotland Yard."

"You will remember it is very valuable. Mr. Stepanovich offered me a very large sum for it, and he is collecting for a rich American in Paris named Bolton."

"Oh is he?" said I. "Now who is Mr. Stepanovich?"

"A man with a very real knowledge of medieval arts and crafts. I have rarely met anyone so well informed about the Quatrocento."

"Where does he live?"

"Live? Well, really I don't know. You see, I met him in the Museum and we got talking. He has twice since visited me to see my little collection. There is no doubt about Mr. Stepanovich. A pretender can't impose on me."

"What is he like?"

"He is, let me see, an elderly man with a long white beard. Yes, he wears spectacles. He is a little brusque, perhaps, in speech—opinionated I might say. We did not agree about my majolica. He was wrong about that, but he has real taste, and his knowledge is extensive."

"When did you see him last?"

"He came in last Wednesday, or was it Thursday, and stayed to dinner. It was then he made an offer for the dagger."

"Did you miss the dagger next day?"

"How did you know?"

"I don't—I guess. Well, good morning, gentlemen! the dagger will be safer in Scotland Yard than in Mr. Sanders's cabinet."

CHAPTER III

THE dagger had taken longer than I anticipated, and when I returned to the Yard I was told that Detective Smith was ready to report.

"Well," said Billy, "the Fulham Bank's a wash out. Stepanovich has vanished, and his account was closed a week ago. The manager said he had had an account with them for some six months, and was introduced by a French Bank. He was apparently in the jewellery trade. He paid in very large sums every few days, and drew cheques for equally large amounts. I gather that Fulham Branch had not many such clients. I asked where he lived, and was told 10a Harrington Mansions, but that turned out to be a boarding house where he had stayed for a week sometime back. They knew nothing about him, but his appearance——"

"I know—an old man with a long white beard."

"Wrong! a sleek, black-haired Jew, aged forty or thereabouts."

"Good Lord! there can't be two of them!"

"Why, have you found another?"

"The eminent specialist in medieval antiquities, named Stepanovich, who stole Mr. Sanders's dagger,

was, I understand, an elderly man with a long white beard and a brusque manner of speech."

"My old gent, for a tanner! Think of him pinching anything!"

"No collector, I imagine, could resist the Borgian dagger which killed the Duke of Gandia."

"Oh, that's it, is it! The Borgian dagger! I've seen a film about the Borgias. Pretty hot stuff, the Borgias were—strong in daggers, dope and dungeons —with a fat-faced Pope who was father to them all, pronouncing benedictions."

"Lo, the educational value of the cinema! But have you found the taxi man who drove your old friend?"

"Thought you regarded him, sir, as of no importance."

"I didn't until I heard of my Stepanovich. Now, I think, you may by the merest luck have stumbled on some evidence."

"Yes! The taxi driver has been found. He drove the old gentleman to Acacia Gardens, Hampstead—he can't remember the number—and he received his fare plus one of the old boy's evening papers instead of a tip. He offered to drive me there for nothing if I would bring that old man back with the darbies on."

"I am afraid he will have to wait a bit. Meantime you might go up to Hampstead and have a look round. Come round to Lavender Gardens about nine o'clock. My wife has a sewing party this after-

noon followed by a tea. After that she would complain if there was an additional place at supper. Besides, after a sewing party there will only be cold meat, so I may be detained at the Yard and feed at Gatti's. There's no knowing what the press of business may entail."

CHAPTER IV

AFTER sending off Billy, I went round to Claridge's and made certain inquiries of the hall porter. After that I sent off a bunch of telegrams to the police at various pleasure resorts. I then went to lunch, and had not quite finished when I was told that Sergeant Boston wanted me on the 'phone. Telephones were invented that doctors might prescribe for indigestion.

"That you, Frost? Boston speaking. The body has been identified. Who by? By a Mrs. Ransom. Not got it? R A N S O M. Yes, that's it. She is a lodging-house keeper at 10 Tavistock Terrace. No, ten—T E N. She professes to know nothing about her lodger beyond his name. He paid his rent in advance, and had been there nearly a fortnight. What was he like? I gather he usually came home with the milk, and got out of bed at lunch time. Not much to go on. What's the woman like? So respectable that she is unpleasant? No! that's not a joke. It's a fact. Wait till you see her. There may be something at the lodgings. Go and see and good luck to you."

I went back to my unfinished lunch somewhat disappointed. Why hadn't the man lodged at a boarding house, where every one is curious and every one gossips? My one hope lay in the man's luggage. Would it provide a fresh clue?

CHAPTER V

NUMBER 10 was like the other thirty or forty houses in the terrace, dull and uninteresting. It had a basement with high railings in front of it, and a front door that would have been all the better for a coat of paint. The door was opened by an untidy girl with the expression of one who expected abuse and was prepared to answer back. She showed me into what had been the dining-room of the house when it was a home. At present it was the living-room of Mrs. Ransom. The furniture had evidently been bought at the sales of lodging-house keepers who had gone bankrupt, and the carpet had, like Mrs. Ransom herself, seen better days.

Mrs. Ransom was dressed in black, with jet ornaments, and she wore an enormous cameo. Her dark hair was rapidly turning grey. Her eyes were like gimlets behind her gold-rimmed spectacles, and her thin lips were set in a curve of permanent discontent. She was, I found, a lady who was more than satisfied with herself, and very unsatisfied with her surroundings.

She greeted me at first with lady-like reserve, but that soon melted away. She supposed that I

was a detective, but there was little for me to discover in her house. She had always been respectable, and her house had been respectable. If, owing to many misfortunes, she had come down to letting apartments, she was glad to think I was the first policeman who had crossed her threshold, and she hoped that she might never again have to suffer a similar indignity.

And now what exactly did I want.

"How many lodgers have you?"

"Ten at present—that is including Mr. Macmillan, who is dead. My house is always quite full. The first floor rooms are let at £4 a week. They include the front and back drawing-room—the latter serves as a bedroom. They are occupied by a gentleman who goes to the British Museum every morning and who takes his meals at his club. The top rooms—and Mr. Macmillan had a top room, third floor back to be precise—were only thirty shillings a week. Of course, if you wanted a bath or early morning tea, they were extras. Mr. Macmillan did not want a bath or early morning tea. You should find an empty bottle of whisky on his dressing table."

Mr. Macmillan had come to her three weeks ago. He paid for his room in advance, and she asked no questions. Why should she? She was thankful to say that she was not curious, and so long as her guests behaved like gentlemen, and paid like gentlemen, she was satisfied. She did not, like common landladies, pry into what did not concern her.

Mr. Macmillan had a latchkey, of course. He came in at night when he liked. Sometimes he did not come in at all. Sometimes gentlemen were like that. Yes! she understood Mr. Macmillan was sometimes very late. He was certainly late up in the morning. The maid had had the impudence to complain about it. That was how she knew.

No! he did not receive any letters at the house, nor did anyone visit him there. So far as she knew he had not made acquaintance with any one of his fellow-lodgers, but she had not inquired.

She had read the account of the murder in the *Daily Intelligence*. The name Macmillan caught her eye. She did not, as a rule, read about crime. Mr. Macmillan had not been to his room since Monday morning. She was getting anxious. I should understand she felt in some ways responsible for gentlemen who lived with her. So she had gone to the Bank Street Police Station, because she felt it was her duty to do so; however repugnant to her finer feelings, she always did her duty and always would.

She was a tiresome woman and tired me out. I said that I must examine the effects of the deceased, and would send a constable round for them later in the day. She said I might go upstairs if I liked. Everything was untouched in number 10 and the number was painted on the door. I suggested that she might like to be present. She said, No, she was not curious. So I went upstairs alone and found the

bedroom, a stuffy apartment, with ugly furniture but a tolerable bed. Beside it, on a little table, an empty bottle of whisky was conspicuous. I wondered what Macmillan would have said if he had lived to return on Monday night. There were a few things, like hair brushes and a rubber sponge, about the room, and a pair of pyjamas on the bed. In the solitary suitcase of canvas there was a suit of clothes made abroad—also some cuffs, collars and dickeys, some underclothing and a pair of boots bought in Paris. There was nothing to indicate who Mr. Macmillan might be, or what he did in the world. As his boots were wrapped in yesterday's newspaper, I imagined that somebody had been inquisitive enough to go through his belongings.

As I was coming downstairs, the dining-room door opened and Mrs. Ransom called "Lizzie." I stopped at once and hung over the banisters. A voice answered, "Coming, Ma," and a moment afterwards a girl came up from the basement and passed along the passage.

"At last," I said to myself, "the hunt is up." I ran downstairs, opened the door and stopped. There stood a girl with an artificial bloom, carmine lips and hair which had been waved sometime and not permanently.

"My daughter," said Mrs. Ransom.

"Lizzie?" I asked.

"She is Miss Ransom," said the mother with dignity.

"Just so! I should like to ask Miss Ransom if she knew the late Mr. Macmillan."

"Of course not! I have nothing to do with mother's paying guests."

"You may have met him on the stairs and exchanged a few words with him."

"But I didn't."

"You will have nothing, then, to tell all the smart young men who will be round here soon from the newspapers to ask questions and take snapshots?"

"My daughter is going out," said Mrs. Ransom.

"Well then, I'm not, Ma—I've changed my mind —and, Mr. Inspector, I don't mind if I do attend the inquest."

"It won't be necessary, as you did not know Mr. Macmillan."

"Well I may have passed him on the stairs without knowing his name."

"But you said just now you didn't speak to him."

"Oh, saying 'Good morning' and such-like things—they don't count."

"There's a letter found on the dead man, beginning *Darling Mac.*"

"My! that's thrilling."

"It is signed, Your loving Lizzie."

"That's a lie! I never wrote to him in my life."

"I won't allow it. The suggestion is an insult to my daughter," said Mrs. Ransom.

"Does your daughter mind writing *Dearest Mac ?*"

The girl took my pencil from me and scrawled the words like a shop assistant making out a bill.

"Thank you," said I, "do you write script?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Nonsense," said I. "They have been teaching it for the last fifteen years in all elementary schools."

"My daughter," said Mrs. Ransom, "did not go to an elementary school. We may have come down in the world, but, thank God, we have not sunk so low. Miss Ransom was educated at Miss Robertson's private school, which is only just round the corner. You may inquire of her if you have any doubts."

"Thank you," said I. "I hope the reporters won't worry you. I wish you good afternoon."

CHAPTER VI

It is my method to be thorough, and so when I left Mrs. Ransom's, not altogether satisfied with my visit, I went round the corner until I came to a dingy house with a brass plate needing polish: "Miss Robertson. A school for young ladies."

I rang and was admitted. I could hear the hum of young voices in the front room, but I was shown into the small room at the back, which appeared to be Miss Robertson's sanctum. In a few minutes that lady came to me—a thin, tired-looking woman with rather pathetic eyes behind her spectacles. She held my card in her hand, and was evidently frightened. She asked me to sit down, and, taking herself an upright chair, asked: "Is anything wrong? What is it?"

"Don't be alarmed," I said, "I have only called to ask a very simple question. Do you teach your girls to write script?"

"No!" she replied. "I am afraid that we are very old-fashioned. We keep to the old ways." There was a pause and then she added. "They are the only ways we know."

"You have a good many girls?"

"Fourteen this term. Not as many as we should like. It is very hard work for my sister and myself. We cannot afford to keep a staff, and we are not certificated. Most parents to-day prefer a High School. I expect they are right. We cannot compete in knowledge or equipment; but we do try to keep our ideals, and teach what is befitting a gentlewoman. It is hard work and sometimes disappointing."

"You once had a pupil, Lizzie Ransom. Did you succeed with her?"

Miss Robertson smiled in a wan way. "Perhaps I might say we should hardly regard Lizzie as our best advertisement. May I put it in this way? You will not misunderstand me—I know nothing against the girl. Oh, she is not in any trouble, is she?"

"Not that I know of. A lodger of Mrs. Ransom's was murdered in the City two nights ago, and he had on him a letter signed 'Lizzie.' It was in script characters, and the young lady denies all knowledge of it. I have a specimen of the young lady's handwriting."

"How terrible! a man murdered! You can't suspect Lizzie of having anything to do with it?"

"I suspect everyone—that's my business; but you need not be frightened, Miss. I don't think Lizzie Ransom will compromise the reputation of your school."

"I wasn't thinking of the school—I was thinking of the poor child. Perhaps we ought to have done

more for her. I am afraid we have failures. It must be our fault."

"Poor soul," I said to myself when I got outside. "She means so well and she tries so hard—but no one so full of self-depreciation could hope to make a girl, a school, or anything else a success!"

CHAPTER VII

On returning to Scotland Yard the Chief sent for me, and I told him how little I had discovered. He said our man had returned from a somewhat fruitless visit to Paris. The bill was that of a lady of easy virtue. She had been traced all right, but had nothing much to tell. She had met Mr. Macmillan at a Montmartre café, had lived with him for a fortnight and had had a good time. Then Mr. Macmillan had been called to London, promising to return in a day or so. He had not done so, and she had forwarded him her bill at the hotel. He had paid it.

"Well, that's the first decent thing we have heard of him. What's the woman's name?"

"Hortense Lebon. She knows nothing of Macmillan, and wrote to him at a poste restante address. She thought he was a commercial traveller. He went out, she does not know where, about ten each day, and usually returned at four. He seemed to have plenty of money, and did not mind spending it."

"Did she think he was English?"

"She didn't know. He spoke fluently what she called foreigner's French."

"It sounds commonplace enough, and he looks commonplace enough. But you don't find the ordinary commercial with a Borgian dagger in his back, £500 in his pockets, and nothing to identify him but the visiting cards of a multi-millionaire, which were not stolen—the Knickerbocker Club gives that away. I wonder whether the key to the mystery lies in New York, or is the solution to be found in Mr. Bolton, who is also of Paris."

"I have heard from the Sûreté about Bolton. Here's a description of his appearance, which Boston can verify. There, you see. He has been living at the Hôtel Bristol off and on for some seven years, and is a collector of *objets d'art.* He is well received in the most exclusive circles of French Society, and is on intimate terms with many diplomats of various countries. He also frequents artistic coteries, but he does not mix much with his own people. No one seems to know who he is, or whence he derives his money. He is just the rich American, and no questions asked. For the past year he has taken a great deal of interest in the affairs of the Russian Exiles, and there is a rumour of his engagement to the Princess Propotkin. He left the Bristol for London about a fortnight ago and has not returned there. The Sûreté believe that he is not in Paris."

"Well, he is another person about whom we might learn something from the political side. They think they know all about Russia."

CHAPTER VIII

"HERE you are, Billy! Come straight in! Mrs. Frost is tired after her working party and has gone early to bed. I hope you have not had a wasted day. I can tell you all that I have discovered in about five minutes."

"My strict report would not take as long. I have done nothing but locate Mrs. Brown as housekeeper to Stepanovich in Acacia Villas, Hampstead."

"That's suggestive, but may not be important. Let's see! Brown, ex-convict, is valet to Bolton. Mrs. Brown, who has also done time, is housekeeper to Stepanovich, and the Borgian dagger, presumably stolen by Stepanovich, is found in the back of the murdered man, while Bolton is brooding over the corpse."

"And don't forget, sir, that the murdered man is just outside Festonen's offices, and that Festonen takes lunch with Stepanovich. Also that the murdered man has £500 on him that he presumably received from a Stepanovich if not from my old man."

"I am not forgetting Festonen. But just let me hear your story."

"I went to Hampstead on the top of a bus. That is the way to see the world. If I hadn't I should not have seen Mr. and Mrs. Brown coming down the Finchley Road, and our one and only Bobby—that's Detective Roberts, sir—after them. I nipped off the bus and joined up with Bobby, who had followed Brown from Claridge's to Hampstead Heath, where Brown had met his wife. Of course Bobby did not know it was his wife. I put him wise on that point. So we strolled along discreetly on the other side of the road until the happy pair stopped suddenly, and had an affecting farewell. Brown went on, but Mrs. Brown came back, crossing the road to have a look at us. I was turned to the wall as she passed with my hands up, trying to light a fag in the wind. When the loving pair were some sixty yards apart, they turned to wave to one another. Most affecting, but Bobby and I were talking on the kerb and not paying any attention. After that we parted, Bobby trailing Brown, and I after his missus, and where did she take me but to Acacia Villas. I saw the whisk of her tail as she turned in at one of the garden gates, and, as luck would have it, a butcher boy came out a moment after.

"'Do you know the name of the lady who has just gone in?' I asked.

"No! I don't," says he. 'She's just old Bluebeard's housekeeper.'

"'And who may Bluebeard be?'"

"'Don't know that either,' says he. 'He may be a Bolshi. At least he's a Russian who won't be put off with Canterbury lamb."

"'Did you happen to be inquiring for Mr. Stepanovich?' said a voice at my back. 'He lives in that house.' It gave me rather a turn to be caught like that, and I turned, to see an out-at-elbows, unshaven man, smoking a short pipe.

"'No! I wasn't,' said I. 'I was just asking who a lady was. I saw her going in here.'

"'Rather old for you, I'm thinking,' said the man.

"'She was a friend of my mother's time back in Dolminster. We had lost sight of her.'

"'Going in to renew your acquaintance?'

"'Not just now. I haven't time. Why do you ask?'

"'I thought you might say a word for me to Mr. Stepanovich.'

"'I don't know him, I tell you.'

"'That's a pity. You look over that gate. Shocking neglected garden, that is. I was thinking you might say a word for me to the old gentleman. I'm a jobbing gardener, I am.'

"'You'd better apply for the job yourself.'

"'Maybe I shall. But these foreigners are funny folk. I'd rather a friend spoke a word for me.'

"'He mightn't want strangers about the house.'

"'I should be in the garden.'

"'I never knew a jobbing gardener who didn't spend some time in the kitchen.'

"'You think yourself a smart 'un, don't you? But I should like to know, young feller, what you do when you aren't running after females as are too old for you. I saw you a-following her.'

"'I'm on the dole, if you want to know.'

"'Then why don't you go and see mother's old friend.'

"'Why don't you go and get your job?'

"''Cause I've something else to do this afternoon, and that old gent might want me to start in at once.'

"'You seem to know a good deal about him.'

"'I lives near by.'

"'And I suppose he's always at home?'

"'Don't like visitors to his housekeeper, you mean?'

"'Oh, he's that sort, is he? Maybe he hasn't many visitors of his own.'

"'How should I know? Perhaps you know who comes here?'

"'I know a brother might come to see Mrs. Brown —a gentlemanly-looking bloke, with a fair moustache and rather bulging blue eyes.'

"'Now, might he? She's a widow, ain't she? Sure he's her brother and not your hated rival.'

"'Don't be a fool! You haven't chanced to see him?'

"I'm not always loafing round. I'm not on the dole, and I ain't so blooming inquisitive as you are.'

"'I like that,' said I. And just then I tumbled to it, and showed him my warrant card. 'Ever seen anything like this?'

"'It isn't so unlike mine,' he replied.

"He was Detective Ford, of the Northern Division. I couldn't help laughing."

"Billy," I said, severely, "murder is no laughing matter. I hope you and Detective Ford were able to exchange valuable information."

"Well," continued Billy, "we first went round the corner, and he had one with me and then I had one with him. After that we went to Hampstead Heath and sat on a bench, where we could exchange confidences, while we smoked. You see, it's like this. Old Sanders had been to the police bleating about his dagger, and the police had gathered from his artless tale a notion that they ought to get acquainted with Stepanovich.

"'We haven't evidence enough to apply for a search warrant,' said Ford.

"'And you would not find anything,' said I, 'for the dagger is at Scotland Yard.'

"'Where did you find it?' said he.

"'Sticking in the poor chap who was murdered in Bolter's Court.'

"After that I told him all about the Browns, and in future he will watch Stepanovich and let us know. We are to let him know, also, anything we find out about the dagger. He'll apply for that job, if his boss will let him, to-morrow morning. He says he likes gardening."

CHAPTER IX

"Now, Billy, after listening to your irrelevant diversions let's turn to the letter we haven't discussed yet. You have a copy, read it out."

DARLING MAC,

It was all right up at Hampstead, but who would have thought of seeing the Bogy man in an A.B.C. shop! It's lucky he did not see us. I shouldn't like any harm to come to you. No! not for £500. You take my advice and stick to old Goggle Eyes as I do. The pay may be small, but it's sure and he's honest. The other folk promise more, but sooner or later you'll be FIRED. Do you remember the story of the brass and china pot? Just pull up your socks and think about it.

Your loving,

LIZZIE.

"A very sensible man, Lizzie," said I.

"Man?" cried Billy.

"Of course," said I. "A woman would have had

'a lovely time' at Hampstead, and done a little pleading with Mac, saying how *she* would feel if things went wrong."

"Well, we know Mac did not take the advice. He had the £500."

"And received a knife in the back instead of being fired at. Who's the Bogy man?"

"Old Stepanovich. I've seen him in an A.B.C."

"And Goggle eyes?"

"Festonen."

"You may be right. But who are the other folk?"

"Don't know. I'm beat."

"But they are not going to beat me."

"Inspector Frost is on his mettle—cheerio!"

"And before I find them, it may be dangerous for you, Billy."

"Right oh! What do you want me to do?"

"To-morrow morning you might go round to 10 Tavistock Terrace and take a room there. There is only one vacant, the one that was let to the late Mr. Macmillan. Mrs. Ransom advertises in *Apartments Weekly*. That's how you came to know of her lodgings. You are a young man from a provincial town—choose one that you know something about. You have just got a job in a large drapery business. Choose a big shop. They'll be more interested in you. You don't start work until Monday morning. That will explain your loitering a good deal about the house. Don't stay in all day. Be always

coming and going. They will get accustomed to your being on the staircase. Explore as you find opportunities."

"Good business, and I shall see the lovely Lizzie who didn't write the letter."

PART THREE

Thursday

CHAPTER I

"THERE'S a cutting from this morning's *Daily Intelligence* which should interest you," said the Chief, and he passed it over to me.

> "Among the passengers who joined the *Mauretania* at New York, yesterday morning, was the millionaire, Mr. Mckinley M. Macmillan, who was reported murdered in the midday editions of the *Evening Sentinel* on Tuesday. He was accompanied by his partner, Mr. Anthony Stanford, and his friend, Mr. Jefferson Jones, the celebrated lawyer and State Attorney. Mr. Edward van Storck also joined the boat at the last minute and was lucky to find the royal suite disengaged. Mr. van Storck, it will be remembered, was also erroneously connected with the Bolter's Court mystery by our unfortunate contemporary. We should like to see the meeting of Mr. van Storck with the young gentleman, still unknown, who impersonated him. That he was able to disappear is no credit to the police."

"What do you make of it?" asked the Chief.

"Quite an American invasion," said I. "We must hurry up if we are to be ready to receive them properly. Have you the dossiers from the political side?"

"Here they are. I don't like them. It looks as if the case is going to be awkward."

"Horribly awkward for the man who is hanged."

"Awkward also for us—all international cases are."

"Do you want the case hushed up?"

"Of course not; we stand for British justice."

"Good! Well now let us see what they say.

> "'*Friedrich Festonen*, age about forty-five. A Finn by birth. A naturalised British subject since 1913. Timber importer and agent. Very rich. Address, Helsingsfors, Dartmouth Avenue, Blackheath, and 8 Bolter's Court, E.C. Anti-Bolshevic. Acts as agent for Russian exiles both here and in Paris. Quite honest. Has to be carefully watched lest he involve this country with the Soviet. In the past Scotland Yard has received much valuable information from him.'"

"Sound chap, I should say."

"All amateur conspirators," said the chief, "are a nuisance."

"Would you call old Stepanovich an amateur? Here's what they say about him:

"'*Michael Stepanovich*, age sixty-seven. A Russian Jew. Before the war kept a well-known antique shop in St. Petersburg. Fled to England, 1917. Lives at 4 Acacia Villas, South Hampstead. Makes a living by buying and selling curios on commission. Very active apparently in the interests of Russian exiles. Not above suspicion.'"

"They are not all fools on the other side. Now listen to this:

"'*Alexander Stepanovich*, age forty. Russian Jew. Son of the above. Professes extreme communist opinions. Makes a living by selling Russian jewels in London, Paris and Amsterdam. Has been in London for three months, but left on Tuesday morning by the Boat Express. No sign of any correspondence with his Father. They are supposed to have quarrelled.'"

"Yes, that's it—'*supposed* to have quarrelled.' I should not be surprised if we poor fellows, restricted to local crime, were to find evidence that those who *supposed* were wrong."

"You may, Inspector, but don't forget that your business is to solve the Bolter's Court mystery."

"Did you ever know of a mystery which didn't bring others to light."

"Perhaps not. You see, they don't attach much importance to Bolton."

"Oh don't they! They wouldn't! They say:

"'*Robert Hugh Bolton*, American citizen, about thirty-five years of age. Has been living on and off for the last seven years at the Hôtel Bristol, Paris. Well known on the Riviera and other popular resorts. Spends money freely and collects antiques. Mixes in exclusive French society, and also with diplomats. Is said to be engaged to Princess Propotkin, and has of late been interested in Russian affairs—finances exiles. Has paid two flying visits to England and seen Festonen and Stepanovich. Recently came to London—Claridge's Hotel—presumably for the season. A social butterfly. We consider him negligible.'

"The man who took in Boston and eluded me is not negligible. They've taken him at the Sûreté valuation. I'm after him all right. He went away with an old suitcase and a bag of golf clubs."

"Nothing wicked about that."

"No! But it shows that he thinks himself safe, and he isn't."

"Why do you think him important?"

"Because he got the better of me. I want a search warrant to go through his effects."

"All right! What happens to-day?"

"The inquest."

"Are you going?"

"Not I! I saw Boston half an hour ago and arranged all that. First P.C. Johnson will tell how

he found the body. Then P.C. Daniels will explain why he did not find it some six hours earlier. He has a good many of those little courts on his beat, and he was called off by a police whistle just as he was approaching it. When he returned to his beat he was lower down the street. Then Sergeant Boston will tell about the American who impersonated van Storck, and will give your opinion that he was a young man on a tour who did not want it interrupted by a murder trial, and so crossed the Channel at once. Next Mrs. Ransom may say what she pleases when she identifies her lodger, and then Mr. Sanders will not be encouraged to say much when he identifies the dagger. It is particularly to be hoped that he will not mention Stepanovich. Lastly, it will be announced that the police are still hoping to trace how that £500 came into the hands of the murdered man. The verdict is inevitable."

"What are you going to do?"

"Well, I am walking up to Claridge's with that warrant in my pocket, but whether I use it to-day depends on Mr. Brown being out. Then I shall stay here and await developments. Will you send a man to Hampstead, for Billy Smith is otherwise engaged? At 4 Acacia Villas he will find Detective Ford, probably gardening. I want him told to 'phone to me at once if Mr. Stepanovich goes out after the verdict of the inquest is known. I shouldn't be surprised if he sought another interview with Festonen. But wait a minute—here's something much more

important: I want a cable sent to the Milwaukee police—that's where the Triple Mac comes from—and ask if they know anything about an absconding clerk during the past year. The murdered man must have had some reason for assuming that name. He must have been in the States to know that there was one multi-millionaire who had never been in Europe, and was not personally well known over there—a man who won't be photoed or interviewed, who might wear cheap clothes and live in cheap lodgings."

CHAPTER II

It was about half-past nine when I walked past Claridge's and saw Detective Roberts, as the complete loafer, lighting a fag on the kerb. It was obvious, in consequence, that Mr. Brown had not yet come out, and on the chance that later he might be going to Hampstead like Billy by bus, I continued my walk as far as the Marble Arch. I was just turning round at the corner of Park Lane to retrace my steps when I saw Brown jostling his way through the crowd on the pavement. To avoid a meeting I clambered into a bus—then discovered it was a Shepherd's Bush bus, and that I did not want to go to Shepherd's Bush, so I jumped off as it started. By this manœuvre I had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Brown's back on the top of a Hampstead omnibus, and, hailing a taxi, was a few minutes later at Claridge's Hotel.

I asked to see the manager, and showed him my search warrant. I explained about the murder and the young American whom I had traced to his hotel. I told him what my Chief thought was the explanation of his conduct, but that Scotland Yard was none the less thorough in its methods. I assured him

that at the Yard we should be sorry to cause any unpleasantness in his hotel, or even any unpleasantness to the foolish young man who had tried to deceive us. So, I was particularly anxious that the warrant might be executed at once, and that Mr. Bolton's valet should know nothing about it. I asked the manager to accompany me in my search.

Mr. Bolton's apartments were luxurious, and he had piles of luggage, all of it empty. In the drawers of the bedroom were any number of clothes—most of them quite new. There was a case in the table drawer containing trinkets, studs and tie pins. There were enough toilet requisites to stock a shop. There were no books except a Continental Bradshaw, and a novel by Marcel Proust. There were no letters or documents save a small engagement book, filled with neat entries of what were evidently social functions, and the entries ended some three weeks back. There was one photograph in a morocco case signed "Sonia," who was, I supposed, the Princess Propotkin, and I felt baffled.

"Nothing of criminal import here," said the manager.

"No!" said I—"I suppose his man forwards his letters."

"I expect so."

"Where to?" I asked.

"How should I know?" said the manager.

"But you know he has letters,"

"Oh yes! And many important people have been here to leave cards during the last few days. Mr. Bolton is evidently well known in society. You have finished your inspection and found nothing?"

"Wait a minute! What about that bag?"

From under the bed I drew forth a black shiny bag such as clerks carry. It was empty.

"Nothing very suspicious about that," said the manager as I examined it carefully.

"It's a London bag," said I. "It is not very new. Why should Mr. Bolton have such a bag? It's a funny thing to find in this dandiacal apartment."

"Perhaps it belongs to his valet," said the manager.

"Perhaps," said I. "Now let us see the valet's room."

Mr. Brown's room was simple, and his luggage was not extensive. Mr. Brown apparently read detective novels, for there were two at his bedside. Mr. Brown's brushes and razors left nothing to be desired. They were of the best. He had also a gold watch and a diamond ring. I could not tell if the stone was a diamond, and the manager laughed at the idea, but the manager did not know more than I did about diamonds. So I shook him by the hand, and said, "I am satisfied"—but I wasn't. The black bag had not been explained.

CHAPTER III

At lunch time I heard the verdict of the inquest. Everything had gone as I desired. Mr. Sanders had expatiated on the value and historical associations of his dagger, but as someone had previously laughed at him for trusting Stepanovich, his vanity caused him to be silent about that venerable fraud.

At three o'clock I received a call over the telephone from Boston.

"That you, Frost. Boston speaking. A woman has been here about that £500. She came about one o'clock. Says she is Mrs. Stepanovich, of Exeter Mansions, Fulham."

"What is she like?"

"About forty. Neatly dressed—carries herself well—has plenty of assurance."

"What is her story?"

"She says the notes belong to her husband, Alexander Stepanovich. She has the numbers all right. She says her husband has written to her from Paris that he must have had his pocket picked on Monday night as he left Victoria. He did not discover his loss before reaching France."

"That's an ingenious story. Master Stepanovich has pegged out a good claim, but there's a catch in it. He did not go by the night boat to Paris on Monday. One of our C.I.D. men, who shepherds Communists, had the pleasure of seeing him off by the ten o'clock from Victoria on Tuesday morning."

"Where is Stepanovich?"

"I don't know, but at a guess I should say approaching Moscow. Where is the lady?"

"One of my men followed her, and travelled on a bus with her as far as Piccadilly Circus, but he lost her in the Tube. He has just 'phoned through that she is unknown at Exeter Mansions. That's odd, you know. What's her little game? It's not the way to get £500."

"If she thinks it safe to follow it up, you will find it was Axminster Mansions and your mistake. If the game is too dangerous, she thinks that she is free."

"Have you anything to suggest?"

"Yes! I suggest that you or your man go round to 4 Acacia Villas, Hampstead, and see if old Mr. Stepanovich's housekeeper resembles your lady. I should not be surprised if Stepanovich, senior and junior, were one firm after all."

CHAPTER IV

At three forty-five I received another call.

"Detective Ford, Mr. Stepanovich's gardener, speaking. Yes! I got the job this morning. I like gardening. The place already looks more tidy."

"You did not ring me up because of my well-known interest in horticulture?"

"No! Mr. Stepanovich, a quarter of an hour ago told me to fetch a taxi. He has just started for an A.B.C. shop in Bank Street, the City. So I just nipped to this call box to let you know."

"Thanks very much. What are you doing now?"

"Going to have some tea with Mrs. Brown, I hope. She has been out most of the morning, but has just come in."

"Do jobbing gardeners generally get tea?"

"No! but it was part of my bargain with old skinflint. He's getting me cheap, because of that cup of tea. Some people are a deal too clever."

"And cut themselves. I congratulate you."

A few minutes later I was in a taxi on my way to the A.B.C. shop. I stopped at the corner of the

street and strolled along until I came to it. Then I looked in at the door and spotted an old gentleman with a long beard at the back of the shop, sitting at a table and reading a paper. The next table was empty and I intended to occupy it, but a boy with his girl got in front of me, and I had to be content with a place near the door.

After a few minutes a man entered, whom I recognised as Mr. Festonen from Billy's description. He made straight for Mr. Stepanovich, sat down at his table and ordered tea. The old gentleman folded his newspaper and the two were soon engaged in excited conversation.

I approached the counter in search of a bun, in order to get nearer to them, but I found them to be talking in a language I do not know. (I don't know any language but English.) So I returned to my table without any further ill thoughts of the youthful couple who had appropriated my chosen seat.

In the end I had my reward. As Mr. Festonen stood near me at the pay desk settling both bills, the old man growled in English: "I tell you he is all right. The other was an impostor, and he has had his reward. It was a lucky escape for you."

"I am not often done."

"You weren't done this time, but you were lucky."

"I'm not so sure, but no matter! Remember we dine at eight sharp. My wife likes people to be punctual."

From this fragment of conversation I came to the conclusion that Mr. Stepanovich wished Mr. Festonen to believe that the murdered man had intended to swindle him by denouncing someone who was all right, but I remembered that Mr. Stepanovich himself was not above suspicion.

I watched Mr. Festonen cross the road and disappear up Bolter's Court. Mr. Stepanovich, on the other hand, dropped into a post office, no doubt to telegraph that he would not be home to dinner. I was waiting for him to come out, when, turning suddenly, I found myself face to face with Brown. Probably neither of us wanted to meet just then. It was unavoidable.

Mr. Brown would have passed on, but, taking his arm, I piloted him to a saloon bar—a quiet place, and offered him a drink.

"Watching the old boy who has just gone in?" said I to Brown.

"That's what you were doing, sir, I think," said Brown to me.

"And what were you doing."

"Taking a walk round, sir. There is not much else to do with my master away."

"Of course not," I said. "And that reminds me that I wanted to ask you where you forwarded his letters?"

"I don't send them anywhere, sir. I thought I told you that I don't know where he is. I keep them for him. Those are my instructions."

"Quite a pile you must have."

"Well, sir, in the last two days there have been a dozen. I should think, from the look of them, some of them are bills, and some, I should guess, are invitations to dinner. There's no mystery about them. If you care, sir, to come round to Claridge's to-morrow morning, you may see them. We have nothing to hide from the police."

"That's all right, and why are you watching Mr. Stepanovich?"

"Stepanovich, is that his name, sir? A Russian gentleman, I presume. Well, sir, I don't mind confessing I was a bit curious to know why you were following a respectable old man like that."

"Nonsense, Brown! You know all about Stepanovich. You are not jealous, I suppose, about his relations with your wife."

"What do you mean, sir? Oh, I see, you have discovered that Mrs. Brown is housekeeper to Mr. Stepanovich. I'm sorry. I had wanted to save her annoyance."

"What's troubling her?"

"I don't know, and I did not want you to do so. It's a nice quiet place, though it is not the sort of situation to which she has been accustomed."

"I suggest, Brown, that Mr. Stepanovich recommended you to Mr. Bolton."

"That is so, sir."

"Then why did you tell me that you got the job by answering an advertisement?"

"I've told you already. I did not want you to upset Mrs. Brown. It's hard enough, sir, for poor people who have been in trouble to make a new start and earn an honest living. When once you've been in prison the 'Busies' never leave you alone."

"Let's put it the other way, Brown. Soon after I am on to a new crime I run against an old lag. He mayn't be guilty, but he's in the swim. The professional criminals in England form a very small class. That's something as a nation we may be proud of. Of course there are the beginners. They often give us a lot of trouble and then escape. You had a good run for your money before you were caught—and you have not had much luck since—have you?"

"That's the reason, sir, I am trying to live honest now."

"Very good! Then perhaps you don't mind telling me what Mr. Stepanovich has to do with Mr. Bolton."

"I believe he collects curiosities for him."

"What has he bought from him since you have been in his service?"

"I don't know, sir. Mr. Bolton's collections are, I understand, on loan at a Museum in Paris, until he has a house of his own."

"He will have that, I suppose, when he marries the Princess Propotkin."

"Mr. Bolton, sir, has not taken me into his confidences."

"Well, Brown, we must both be getting on. I shall see you again shortly."

Mr. Brown neglected to say, "It would be a pleasure."

CHAPTER V

It was by the afternoon post that I received tidings of Mr. Bolton's whereabouts, and gave orders accordingly. I was, in consequence, rather pleased with myself when Billy appeared to report just as I was leaving for home.

"Well, Billy," I said, "you have rather a festive appearance. You don't look like a working man."

"You forget, sir, that Mrs. Ransom's lodger does not start work at that famous draper's until Monday morning."

"Have you anything to report? You look as if you were out to kill. Is it Lizzie? She won't have you. She doesn't like detectives."

"Some detectives, sir. Besides I am not for her a detective. I am the hero of a shop where you can buy everything that the heart can desire—whereas Lizzie has just lost her place as book-keeper at a milk shop. Poor girl, she couldn't do sums. She means to be a mannequin at *my* establishment, and the heroine that we watched at the Pictures this afternoon."

"I think, Billy, as your godfather, it may be my duty to reprove you for trifling with the affections

of young ladies; but first of all you had better tell me your story."

"I obeyed orders, sir, and secured the tenth room in the tenth house of Tavistock Terrace at ten o'clock this morning, being the tenth day of the month. There is something ominous about that, but I'm blest if I know what it is. Ma Ransom—I have not seen her yet—had gone to the inquest, and left Elizabeth in charge of the home feeling just like Cinderella, and then I turned up like the prince in the fairy tale. Elizabeth, I am bound to say, was a little haughty upon the door mat and tried to rush me another five bob; but my persuasive tongue and fascinating appearance overcame her. Besides, I am to take a bath and early tea, which you remember, sir, are extras."

"Get to business, Billy."

"At present, sir, I am confessing to my godfather. I am a human being and not only a policeman. You will be glad to know that I have a latchkey and am quite at home at Number 10. Elizabeth always calls it Number 10."

"Does she?"

"And she is no longer Elizabeth to me, but simply Lizzie. I have just seen her home after taking her to the pictures. They have quite a good show at the Frascati. Ma Ransom is not to know. Ma Ransom, says Lizzie, might have been Noah's wife and come out of the Ark. I have had many intimate confidences from Elizabeth."

"Anything to the purpose?"

"Yes. Lizzie thinks reporters are ever so much nicer than detectives. They don't take you up short, and they are better looking."

"Any more of this, Billy, and I will chuck you out."

"Also, Lizzie is quite sure that the murdered man was Mr. Macmillan, whatever the papers may say. Hasn't she seen lots of papers addressed to Mr. Macmillan, though he did keep them underneath his shirts."

"Where are they now?"

"Lizzie doesn't know. They were not among his things after his death. He must have taken them away with him when he went out the last time."

"I expect he did! You find out from Lizzie if he was carrying a black shiny bag."

"Not an attaché case?"

"No, a black shiny bag. That's what I'm expecting."

"Lizzie might not notice anything so vulgar."

"And Mr. Bolton, for the same reason, did not take it to Harlech."

"Harlech, sir? Is that where he is? Am I to go a long railway journey and arrest him?"

"No, Billy. He is playing golf, and why should we interfere with his innocent amusements. He is not wanted for a day or so, and I hope he will make the most of his time. I have sent Detective Mander to the St. Justinian's Hotel with the warrant in his

pocket. He will shepherd our friend back to London when we are ready for him."

"You might have sent me. I can at least give Mander a stroke a hole, and I have some new plus fours which are 'it'."

"Sorry, but I wanted someone who would just fit into that hotel lounge without being noticed. Mander will do that all right. He was a duke's servant before he joined us."

"What's left for me?"

"Look after Lizzie and your fellow lodgers, and report anything you discover. Wait a bit! I am betraying no secret when I say, the Chief has his eye on you."

CHAPTER VI

I HAD reached home. I had had my supper. I was engaged in playing cribbage with my wife when our little maid announced that a Mr. Roberts wanted to see me very particularly on business and at once.

"Show him into the master's study," said my wife grandly. Then, as the door closed, she added: "Am I never to have a quiet evening with you alone. I don't know who this Roberts is, or what he has come to tell you, but I am sure it could have waited until to-morrow morning."

I murmured how sorry I was, and proceeded to my study, which is about eight feet square. To justify its name it has only one comfortable chair, with a small table beside it, on which is a yellow tobacco jar, three old pipes, a box of matches and an ash tray. The last was a present from my wife, much prized but never used. Detective Roberts was in the comfortable chair as I entered, but he stood up, and when we sat down again he had the straight-backed abomination in which my wife prefers to sit.

"Something important happened?" I asked.

"Yes, Brown has escaped."

"From Claridge's and from you?"

"Yes! That's it. I saw him meet you in the City this afternoon. Then he went into the post office for some minutes. Afterwards he walked all the way back to the hotel. It's tiring work, shadowing men who take so much exercise. Half an hour after he got back a taxi was called. Several suitcases and wraps were brought out—and then Mr. Brown suddenly appeared, nipped into the taxi and was gone."

"What did you do?"

"What could I do? Even if I could have crossed the road in time, I had no right to stop Brown. My orders were to watch him. I was dressed as a loafer, and I did not think you wanted any publicity at Claridge's."

"Good heavens! No!"

"So I went home, dressed in my best but quietest clothes, and I think I looked the part of a gentleman's servant. Then I came back to the hotel to ask for my friend Brown. I was told he was gone, and quite naturally I asked for his address. The waiter I got hold of was quite a decent chap and inquired for me at the office. He says that Brown had received a telegram from his master to join him at the house he was going to stay at, and letters could be forwarded c/o Sir Walter Gerrans, Bt., the Manor, Aldersford. Do you want me to go there?"

"Certainly not, for Brown is certainly not there. He got four years on Dartmoor for robbing Sir Walter Gerrans. I had to do with it. But that's another story."

"I hope, sir, you don't blame me."

"Not at all. You're all right. But it's one up to Brown. I expect that he has robbed his master. He has also robbed me of information which I had hoped to extract from him."

"My dear," I said, as I returned to my wife, "you were quite right—you always are. The news might have waited for to-morrow. One is never in a hurry to hear that one has been outwitted.

PART FOUR

Friday

CHAPTER I

DISAPPOINTMENTS never come singly. The first person I interviewed on Friday morning was Detective Ford. I had never seen him, but I liked the look of him. He was an out-of-doors man, like myself—a little rough in manner, but shrewd. I won't say there were no pretences about him, for he was a detective; but he had no frills.

He had covered himself with glory so far as his own Division was concerned, but he felt that he had rather let me down, and he came to apologise. Mrs. Brown had escaped, like her husband. I told him that it was no good crying over spilt milk or disappearing ladies; that I never expected a straight run to a kill—there was generally a check somewhere—and that when I had heard his story I should no doubt have fresh clues to follow up. "Now," said I, "when I heard from you last you were just about to have tea with Mrs. Brown."

"But I didn't. I went in at the back door and there she was. She pointed to a chair by the kitchen table, poured me out a cup of tea, and put a stale loaf

and some margarine on the table. She didn't seem to care for talk—I was too rough for her taste perhaps. Anyhow she left me to myself. When I thought that she had had time to get upstairs, I stole to the door, opened it, and there she was just on the other side. 'I was just coming back to see if you wanted another cup,' said she, and I hadn't had the sense to empty the first one. What's more, she saw it. I was that vexed with myself that I went straight back to the garden and began digging—digging makes you feel a man again. I hadn't been at it long when a young man came through the gate and went straight up the steps to the front door and rang the bell. I gave over digging and went for my broom, which I had left conveniently by the steps. Mrs. Brown opened the door, and the young man said he had come from the dyer's for the curtains. Mrs. Brown said she had no curtains to be dyed, and shut the door in his face. He tipped me a wink as he passed out, and I knew he was a detective, but what he was doing poaching on our ground I can't think."

"He was just seeing if she was the woman who tried to bounce Sergeant Boston out of £500, and she was. What happened next?"

"Next a telegraph boy arrived, and Mrs. Brown said there was no answer. I found out afterwards it was from old Stepanovich to say that he would not be home to dinner. Then another telegraph boy arrived, and Mrs. Brown afterwards must have

retired to find an onion. Anyhow when she called me to the kitchen door she was weeping bitterly."

"I'm a tender-hearted man, Inspector. She really did it very well—I have to own up—she took me in.

"'Oh, Mr. Ford,' says she. 'My husband's dying.'

"'Why, Mam,' says I, 'I thought as you were a widow.'

"'Many did,' says she; 'but William failed in business, and we had to go into service again.'

"'Let me see the wire,' says I. 'Perhaps it is not so bad after all.'

"'There it is: "Husband dying, come at once—Lovel."'

"'Where may he be?' says I.

"'At Croydon.'

"'But the wire was handed in at a City office.'

"'Mr. Lovel is a City man. It's he who sent it. He's William's master.'

"Even then I didn't tumble to it. You see she sobbed so. I couldn't help saying *there, there,* or some such damned silly thing. What ought a man to say when a woman goes on like that?"

"I say, 'Stop it'—but never mind that, you get on with your story."

"She went on saying: 'What am I to do, what am I to do?' And I said: 'Why, go to him, of course.'

"'But Mr. Stepanovich is out, and he is not coming home to his dinner.'

"'That's all the better,' said I. 'You can leave the house to me. I will look after it until Mr. Stepanovich comes home.'

"'Oh, William, William,' she broke out again.

"'You go to him,' says I pretty roughly, for I was getting fed up.

"'You are good to me,' says she. 'Oh, but I can't go. What will the master do for his breakfast tomorrow and he so particular.'

"'He will have that stale loaf and margarine all right, and I hope he'll like it. Now off you go upstairs and put your clothes on.'

"She went at last, and came down presently with a green canvas suitcase. She gave me the key, and sobbing her gratitude, went off. I watched her out of the garden gate—and then, I think—after all it's a bit of luck for me. I have plenty of time for a good look round, and if I can't find the dagger I may find something else. So I went upstairs, and this is the first thing I saw on the dining-room table. It made me hot all over. It's an insult—a damned insult to my intelligence. You read it?"

DEAR MR. FORD,

It was good of you to make everything so easy for me. You are really a very

nice man for a policeman. I have taken away the jewelry. It would be a pity for all the old Blighter's swag to be collared by the Busies.

Your much obliged,

MARY BROWN.

I read this note which Detective Ford thrust into my hands, and remarked, "It's a clever woman who knows when her game is up, and it is the privilege of woman to have the last word. You mustn't grudge it her."

"I suppose I mustn't," said Ford, but his voice was still indignant. "She got away with the jewels, swindling us and her master, but there was plenty of swag left behind. Strangely enough, it was all in a great cupboard in Mrs. Brown's room. I suppose the crafty old Jew had meant to plead that the ex-convicts Brown had made use of his house and carried on their receiving business during his frequent absences from home. I soon had the Station Sergeant round, and a couple of constables. The stuff in that cupboard was the pick of a dozen big hauls. They say old Stepanovich was a great connoisseur. He only took the best. My! it is something like a cop, and after all I couldn't have brought it off but for that slut."

"You mustn't call her that. The great thing I have noted about Mrs. Brown is her neat appearance and the perfect swing of her movements."

"That's as may be—but I haven't come to the end of my story yet. While the sergeant was upstairs, I was standing at the dining-room window, when a fat little Jew, in new clothes, with a flower in his buttonhole, and spats on his feet, came briskly through the gate, swinging a cane. So I opened the door and went to meet him.

"'Who are you?' he asked, suspicious like.

"'I'm the gardener, sir.'

"'How long has Mr. Stepanovich kept a gardener?'

"'Since this morning! The place looks a bit tidier already.'

"He hardly had the grace to turn his head. He might have, for I had put in some real work. But he snapped out: 'Where's Mrs. Brown?'

"'She's been called out.'

"'And Mr. Stepanovich?'

"'He's out, too. Won't you step inside, sir, and wait for him.'

"'No thanks,' he said, and he looked that cunning —'I must be getting on.' With that he spun round and was out of the garden before you could say Jack Robinson. I followed him to the corner. Lor! you should have seen his fat little legs as he sprinted to the Tube station. I've never seen a fat man run faster in my life, and I haven't the ghost of a notion who he is."

"He is Alexander Stepanovich, the confessed Communist. They know something, but not much,

about him on the political side. I thought he was on his way to Moscow. They thought so also, but he has turned up again. Very silly of him."

"I suppose, sir, I ought to have detained him."

"It's rather a pity you didn't. But I tell you what it is, Ford, you look a deal too much like a policeman. Mrs. Brown twigged you and so did the little Jew."

"Well, your smart young chap from the Yard didn't twig me, at least not for a long time."

"Did old Stepanovich return?"

"He hasn't so far. I shouldn't think he would. Either Mrs. Brown or the son must have given him the straight tip. We didn't know where to look for him."

"It's a pity you didn't call me up last night, for I knew—he was dining with Mr. Festonen at Blackheath."

"Is he in it, too?"

"No, he only knows Mr. Stepanovich as an ardent worker for a Tsarist restoration."

"That reminds me. We found a lot of papers in a foreign lingo—Russian, I think. They've been sent here to the Yard to be translated."

"That's a bit of good news for us. Some day you may have to congratulate me on the way I cleared up the Bolter's Court mystery. At present I have to congratulate you on your success. You were quite right to start right in after hearing that story about Mr. Sanders's dagger. A good many people will

thank you who get their treasures. I suppose Lord Ogle's mazer is among the loot. If you can go on now and capture Stepanovich you will get your picture in the *Daily Intelligence,* and you might be transferred to the Yard. If you have the chance, mind you come to us. Good-bye."

CHAPTER II

THE next person who visited me was Billy, and there was a light in his eye.

"You've found out something," said I.

"Yes! That Lizzie is a vixen. She's boxed my ears."

"You might have discovered that without having your ears boxed."

"And I've shaken the dust of the house—there's plenty of it—off my shoes."

"I gave no orders for you to do that."

"Oh it's all right, sir. You will find that I've exhausted its possibilities."

"Then you have discovered something."

"Rather. I generally do, you know, and what's more I've been on the right track from the first."

"Really! When I've heard your story I may blow your trumpet. Until I've heard it you might refrain. Oh, Billy, it is not good to be conceited about having your ears boxed. Why did she do it?"

"Oh! I must begin before that. That was the climax—smacks! You must know that yesterday

afternoon I made such an impression on Lizzie, and she spoke so favourably about me to her Ma, that when I got home there was a little note on my dressing-table hoping I would take coffee with Mrs. Ransom after dinner at nine o'clock. Wasn't that genteel? Of course I went. Ma Ransom is rather a fearsome old girl. She sat in the armchair by the empty fireplace, and I sat, being very shy, on the edge of a chair. The coffee was horrible—muck—but I drank it in the cause of duty. Then Lizzie lighted a cigarette and her mother told her she shouldn't. And Lizzie said everyone smoked now, and Ma Ransom said things had changed since she was a girl. Then gentlemen didn't smoke in the presence of ladies. She didn't suggest, nor did Lizzie, that times had changed about that, so the only smoke I got was what Lizzie puffed in my face.

"Ma Ransom was great on the inquest, and the scandalously inadequate account of it in the *Evening Sentinel*—her name was not even mentioned. She thought the inquiry very badly conducted. She had not even been asked if the man took in a daily paper. 'Did he?' I asked. Yes, he had the *Daily Intelligence* every morning in bed, and he cut bits out also."

"Nice job for you, Billy, this afternoon. You can go through the *Daily Intelligence* for the

last fortnight, and see what there is to cut out."

"I shouldn't have told you that if I had thought I should have the job."

"Did you get anything else out of her?"

"I asked her what sort of man the murdered man was, and she replied: 'Quite ordinary. He looked like a foreigner, but he did not speak like one. He reminded me of someone, but I cannot tell who.'

"'You don't know his business?'

"'No! but he went out every day. Sometimes he carried a black bag and sometimes he didn't.'

"'Did he have a black bag when he went out on Monday?'

"'I don't know,' said Mrs. Ransom.

"'Yes, he did, Ma. It came open on the stairs, and a lot of papers dropped out. I helped him to pick them up, and he did not say as much as "Thank you".'

"'Not very classy,' said I.

"'You have to put up with such people if you are poor,' said Mrs. Ransom. 'The way some people behave would surprise you. Why, there was a detective here two days ago who began by calling Miss Ransom, Lizzie.'

"Well, sir, when I heard that, you may be sure I was properly sympathetic."

"And I am glad, Billy, that somebody has smacked your face."

"I have not come to that yet. So far I have only told you that there was a black bag. That was something you wanted to know."

"Yes! That's important—but go on, you've discovered something else."

"Ma Ransom asked me if I played, so I vamped on the piano which hadn't been tuned for a twelve month. Then I sang them a sentimental song. Then Lizzie sang a sentimental song. By the way, she has quite a good voice. Then we sang a duet. We were getting quite pally when I said good night. Then, remembering your instructions to explore the house and find out about its inhabitants, I wandered accidentally into number 8 and found a gentleman in pyjamas putting his false teeth into a glass. Of course I apologised, and I think he cursed, but he wasn't—what do you call it—he wasn't very articulate."

"When are you coming to discovery number two?"

"In a moment. Where was I? This morning, Doris—she's the general with a grievance—no, dozens of them—brought me my shaving-water and early morning tea at half past seven. I asked after the weather and her health. She said it would drizzle on me when I went out, and her health was no concern of mine. Not an encouraging sort of girl! So I got up and made for the bathroom, and found the gasolene thing out of order. It didn't

improve my temper. And then—I'm coming to it now—I was coming out of the bathroom when the door of number 9 opened. Who should come out but that clerk of Mr. Festonen's—the one I thought was a Russian. He ran past me on the stairs and I'm sure he didn't recognise me. I was in pyjamas and a bath towel. Wasn't it exciting?"

"What did you do?"

"Shaved and dressed myself with my usual care. Then I went outside and looked over the banisters. Nobody seemed about. So I popped into number 9 just to have a look round. There wasn't much to discover until I came to a blotting-pad. The man who had used it had been writing script. Lizzie ought to box his ears for borrowing her name."

"No doubt she will, if she ever hears of it."

"I was just kneeling down to look under the bed—to do that one has to assume an undignified position, and I expect I looked a precious fool, when somebody called, 'Hi!' I scrambled to my feet—I felt pretty hot—and there stood Doris.

"'I was looking under the bed,' I said.

"'So I saw,' said she. 'The last man in number 10 was a murder case. Are you a burglar?'

"'No, I was looking for my other pair of boots. I

thought you must have put them in this room by mistake.'

"'The pair I cleaned are on your feet, and you did not come with another.'

"'Why, my dear, you must have been looking through my suitcase.'

"'That's a lie.'

"'No, it isn't, and I don't mind a little bit. I am always glad when a nice girl takes an interest in me.'

"'I don't want any of your blarney! and you don't catch me believing that tale about your boots.'

"'Quite right, Doris—I may call you Doris, mayn't I? I don't always get my boots so beautifully polished. Now let's sit down side by side and I'll tell you all about it.'

"'I am not sitting down—so there! What I wants to know is—what are you doing in Mr. Wiel's bedroom?'

"'Oh! he's Mr. Wiel, is he? Well, I'll tell you. I am a bit inquisitive. I like to know all about people, don't you?'

"'It is no concern of yours.'

"'Yes, it is. Don't I have to sleep next door, and doesn't he snore. And then, you know, last night he seemed to be pulling his things about. I wondered what he was doing, and thought I'd just look under his bed and see. Now you like to know who people are, don't you, Doris?'

"'Why should I care?'

"Well, I suppose we lodgers are a dull lot for a girl with any spirit in her. Anyhow I feel dull enough, knowing no one. I say, when is your half day?'

"'To-morrow.'

"'Shall we go to the pictures.'

"'Do you mean it?'

"'Yes—and we'll have tea afterwards—and shrimps. Don't let them know downstairs.'

"'About your being under Mr. Wiel's bed?'

"'No, about our little beano.'

"'Not likely! It ain't their business.'

"'Doris, you're a peach. I took that Lizzie yesterday, but I hadn't properly seen you then. As you look like that, you're a deal more pretty.' It was then I kissed her, and glancing up I saw Lizzie looking on. I can't remember exactly what we said to one another, because almost before I got going she screamed and smacked my face. Then Ma Ransom came upstairs and said I'd insulted her daughter. I said that I'd kissed Doris, who wasn't her daughter. She said she would have no such goings-on in her house, and the sooner I was out of it the better. I said what about that thirty-five shillings I paid in advance. She said I must go at the end of the week. I said I would go now, and have the law on her. We left it at that. I went to my room, slammed the door, packed my bag and came away.

"Lizzie was rude enough to cock a snook at me from the dining-room window. I stopped in indignation, and had the pleasure of seeing Ma Ransom boxing her ears. Hurrah!"

CHAPTER III

"BILLY, I have been shocked by this comedy in low life, and if I reported it to Mrs. Frost I am sure she would never again ask you to supper. But from a professional point of view you have not done so badly. It is, of course, by no means certain that the murdered man's black bag is the bag which I have found under Mr. Bolton's bed. It seems, on the other hand, quite clear that the man who signed himself 'Lizzie' is Mr. Wiel, though why he should have written that letter, when 'Darling Mac' occupied the next room, I can't say. Neither can I prophesy what you will find in the *Daily Intelligence*. Meantime I had better put you wise about what has happened."

I told him briefly about the two Stepanoviches and the two Browns, and then we discussed the situation.

"They used to say," I remarked, "that good Americans, when they die, go to Paris. Where do you think Jews go?"

"To Brighton," said Billy, "but for bad Jews isn't it a bit too obvious?"

"Stupid criminals seek the most obscure places where everybody talks about them. People who

think themselves very clever go to the obvious places where no one would think it worth while looking for them. The really clever people stay where they are and concoct an alibi."

"Old Stepanovich could not have gone back to Acacia Villas with any hope of pulling it off."

"I grant you that. He also knows that there is little hope of his getting out of the country even with someone else's passport. So I guess he may be at Brighton. Would you know him again?"

"Rather! There are not many beards such as his. It almost reached his bottom waistcoat button."

"Beards may be clipped or even removed. It's no good noticing people's hair. Now I noted that he shuffled when he walked, that he wore his spectacles on the tip of his nose, and that his coat was out of shape from his habit of walking with both hands pressed down in his side pockets. He has, when he shows them, really beautiful hands."

"And the son?"

"They have a photo of him on the political side."

"You want me to go to Brighton?"

"Well, I thought you might enjoy a week-end at the Universe Hotel."

"I should."

"And if you find them, wire to me and I will come down. Now off you go and study the files of the *Daily Intelligence*. Leave word of your

discoveries if I am not here, and go to Brighton by the five o'clock train."

"And you, sir?"

"I think the time has come when I should visit Mr. Festonen."

CHAPTER IV

WHEN I sent in my card I was at once shown in to Mr. Festonen. He was worried or nervous. He wanted, as far as possible, not to be involved in the matter, and had decided on an attitude of reserve.

"I have come to see you about the murder in Bolter's Court."

"Why me particularly? I am on the top floor and there are nine other offices."

"I have reason to believe that you were here very late on Monday night."

"I was here all night," said Mr. Festonen. "I often am." He rose and opened a further door and showed me a small bedroom.

"When did you hear of the murder?"

"At lunch time, when the mid-day papers came out."

"I suggest, Mr. Festonen, that on Monday night you were staying here because you expected a late visitor."

"Yes!"

"I further suggest that you were expecting the murdered man."

"I had never seen the man I expected; and he had not communicated with me under the name of Macmillan, so I cannot answer that question."

"We have reason to believe that the murdered man was interested in Russia, and that you, Mr. Festonen, are also interested in the same country."

"I was born a Finn, a Russian subject."

"Quite so! and you do not approve of the present Government."

"No! I don't."

"In fact you assist Russian exiles. I am told that Scotland Yard is very grateful to you for the information you have given from time to time."

"I am now a British subject, and it is my duty to pass on any information which may be useful to the country which has given me a home and citizenship."

"Precisely! May I suggest that the information comes to you through agents, and that they sometimes part with it for money."

"That is so."

"They are not always honest, and sometimes betray you."

"Perhaps."

"I suggest that recently there has been a leakage, by which the plans of Russian exiles have reached the Soviet Government."

"That is so."

"And you are very anxious to discover who is the traitor in your midst?"

"Naturally."

"I suggest the man who was to visit you on Monday night claimed that he had papers which would enlighten you."

"Yes."

"And that Mr. Stepanovich wished you to believe that the man was an impostor."

"Mr. Stepanovich!"

"Yes, the gentleman who dined with you last night."

"Really, Inspector, you seem so well informed about me that I wonder you thought this interview necessary."

"Do you know where Mr. Stepanovich is?"

"At Hampstead, I believe."

"Did he receive a message while with you suggesting he should not go home?"

"No! Hardly that. There was a telegram awaiting him from his housekeeper to say that the boiler had burst."

"Had Mr. Stepanovich returned to Acacia Villas—and he didn't—he would have found himself in plenty of hot water. His house is in possession of the police."

"Good heavens! Another Soviet plot?"

"No! Mr. Stepanovich was raided as a receiver of stolen goods. In his house have been found the results of several burglaries. There were also certain papers. They have yet to be translated, but there is little doubt that Mr. Stepanovich was a Soviet spy."

"Impossible! Think what he lost when he fled to England! Mr. Stepanovich was a wealthy man in St. Petersburg. His son—you are sure that you are not mixing him up with his son—his son is a degenerate—his conduct nearly broke the old man's heart."

"And repaired his fortunes! I believe they have worked very cleverly together and been paid by both sides."

"Mr. Michael Stepanovich was very much trusted. He was also a very great connoisseur, known to collectors all over Europe and America. I have heard that his antiques were always genuine, and his prices always fair."

"You can afford to sell stolen property at reasonable prices. It is the burglar, the man who runs the greatest risk, whom I pity. I never heard of a fence that was very liberal to him."

"I can't—— No! I can't believe it all at once."

"Well, we haven't caught the Stepanoviches yet, and I should not have told you about them, following strictly professional etiquette."

"You don't think that Mr. Stepanovich committed the murder?"

"I don't think your correspondent warned you against Mr. Stepanovich."

"He didn't."

"I suggest that the warning was against a Mr. Bolton, who resides in Paris."

"What! you know that also."

"What I want to know is something about Bolton."

"H'm! I don't know much about Mr. Bolton. He resides in Paris, and has the reputation of great wealth. He is engaged to a Princess Propotkin and perhaps for that reason is much interested in Russian affairs. He has been very generous to certain Russian exiles, and is very much in their confidence."

"I know all that. What I want to know is—what did you think of him. He has called on you more than once this year."

"I considered him an enthusiastic young man, not much versed in politics, who was anxious to do things, who might be very useful to our cause because no one would take him seriously."

"And what made you suspect him?"

"Because some of our secrets were undoubtedly betrayed to Moscow a year back, and the information must have come from Paris. More recently the leakage has been from London, but Mr. Bolton, as you seem to know, has been in London more than once this year. I could hardly believe the man a traitor, because I could think of no motive for such conduct."

"Thank you, Mr. Festonen. I am much obliged to you. I should now like to see Mr. Wiel, your confidential clerk." Mr. Festonen hesitated. His face flushed with anger. "I think, Inspector, that I have been perfectly open with you. I will answer any further questions you may ask, but I don't wish

my clerks to be cross-examined about their master's statements."

"I have no intention of doing that; but in a few minutes I hope to convince you that confidential clerks may know things of which their masters did not dream."

CHAPTER V

MR. FESTONEN rang the bell. He was still irritated, and when Mr. Wiel, with anxious eyes, stood in the doorway he was told to come in and shut the door.

"May Mr. Wiel sit down?" I asked, and Mr. Wiel sat down without looking a bit more easy.

"This is Inspector Frost, from Scotland Yard," said Mr. Festonen. Mr. Wiel looked in my direction, cleared his throat and said nothing.

"I understand that he wants to ask you a few questions."

"Yes, sir."

I produced a notebook and pencil, knowing from experience how terrifying they are to a timid man.

"Your full name?" I asked.

"Karl Wiel."

"Age?"

"Thirty-seven."

"Residing at 10 Tavistock Terrace?"

"Yes."

"You are an American citizen and of German origin?"

"Polish, sir."

"Come from Milwaukee?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know all about Mckinley M. Macmillan?"

"Everyone in the States knows about him."

"You know that the murdered man was not the Triple Mac?"

"So the papers say."

"But you know the murdered man?"

"No, sir."

"Nonsense! Come, Mr. Wiel, a man does not write warning letters to someone he does not know."

"Warning letters," gasped Mr. Wiel.

"Yes, a warning letter written in script was found on the murdered man, and a blotting-pad with writing in script containing the last words on each page, has been found in your bedroom."

At this point Mr. Wiel broke down. He glanced round the room as if looking for a way of escape, and finally buried his face in his hands.

"How on earth do you get to know all this?" asked Mr. Festonen.

"The man was murdered in Bolter's Court and lived at 10 Tavistock Terrace. The police naturally inquired about both places and sought some connexion."

"Now, Mr. Wiel, you've got to speak the truth. Your fellow lodger is dead and I have to discover who killed him. You have probably nothing to fear if you speak the truth, but it will be very unpleasant for you if you are arrested as an accessory after the fact."

"Please, sir, I will tell all I know."

"What was the man's real name?"

"Max Wiel."

"Your brother, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"And I suggest he was once in the employ of Mr. Macmillan and absconded with a large sum of money."

"Yes, sir, but it wasn't the money. It was the papers that mattered."

"You found him rooms in Tavistock Terrace, knowing his dishonesty."

"Yes, sir. He was my brother."

"Why was he such a fool as to call himself Macmillan?"

"It's a great name in the business world, and Mr. Macmillan was never over here, and is not much known in the States. I think my poor brother had an idea of passing himself off as the Triple Mac, and I thought myself that there was money in it. Max was full of ideas, but he was never sufficiently careful."

"Quite so. Now, about those papers? Did they concern Macmillan?"

"Yes, sir. They had to do with concessions which he hoped to obtain from Russia. Mr. Macmillan, sir, has more than once surprised the European markets. It was all very secret. Mr. Macmillan's agents have been very useful in forwarding information to the Soviet. The papers, I was told, implicated some important people."

"Among them, Mr. Bolton. Where does he come in?"

"Mr. Bolton, I was told, has been Mr. Macmillan's agent in Paris for years. He was in the know with all the right people there."

"And I suppose he was particularly anxious to recover those papers."

"Yes, sir. I was told that he had fallen in love with a Russian Princess."

"Why didn't your brother go to him?"

"I don't know. Poor Max, he thought too much. That was why he could not make up his mind. I always told him he must take a side and stick to it, but he thought that he would make money out of both sides."

"That's why you wrote him that letter?"

"Yes, sir."

"But why did you write when you were both living in the same house?"

"Well, sir, I only heard he was offered £500 by Stepanovich after he had gone out, and we were both frightened of his father, whom we called the Bogey man. We were always meeting him. I don't know much about the two Mr. Stepanoviches, but I never liked the look of them. I had told Max so lots of times, and when I heard he was going to meet Mr. Stepanovich, junior, I wrote to him at the shop off Tottenham Court Road, where he used to receive letters. I wanted to stop him."

"Why Lizzie?"

"Well I did not want to be mixed up in Max's affairs. You see, sir, I am an honest man."

"And when did you hear of the murder?"

"When a young man came to the office on Tuesday morning. I don't know who he was or what he knew, but he frightened me, and I've been frightened ever since."

"You will come round now and identify the body. There is just time. The funeral is this afternoon. After doing that you need not be very much frightened of anything but your dreams."

CHAPTER VI

On returning to the Yard I was shown a cable from the Milwaukee police with a description of Max Wiel, and details which confirmed his brother's statements; but it was significant that there was no reference to missing papers. About them Mr. Macmillan had kept his own counsel.

Billy also came in, very weary, after a long search through the files of the *Daily Intelligence*. What he had discovered was of no great moment, but it had an interest in developing the case.

Monday, 1st June.

There is a rumour that Mr. Mckinley M. Macmillan, better known as the Triple Mac, has obtained valuable concessions from the Russian Government, and is about to develop Russian trade in timber and oil. The exact extent of the concessions has not been disclosed, but the advent of American energy and dollars into these fields may have far-reaching results.

Wednesday, 3rd June.

A cable from Milwaukee denies emphatically the rumour contained in our Monday's issue, so

we may conclude that our announcement was premature.

Thursday, 4th June.

With reference to our previous statement concerning Mr. Macmillan's supposed negotiations with the Soviet, it has come to our knowledge that the Triple Mac is already in England, *en route* for Moscow, but he prefers to remain strictly incognito.

Friday, 5th June.

We are asked to state that Mr. Mckinley M. Macmillan is in the United States, and has no intention of visiting Europe.

Wednesday, 10th June.

As will be seen in our Shipping News, Mr. Macmillan left New York yesterday on the *Mauretania*. We were, in consequence, only a few days out when we announced his arrival on our shores.

"Why, Billy, do you and I not read the City News?"

"If you had been reading them the whole blessed afternoon you would know the reason. I am bored stiff."

"If you had money to invest, Billy, it would have been different."

"I shan't have any before I get a decided advance in my screw. Sometimes I begin to wonder if this sort of work is worth while."

"Nonsense, Billy! Off you go to Brighton with the feeling that you deserve a week-end. I suppose Brighton has compensations even if one is engaged in seeking for the lost tribes."

CHAPTER VII

It was just as I was leaving the Yard that I received a packet of typewritten sheets about Stepanovich from the other side, and took them home to read.

There was plenty of evidence to establish the fact that the elder Stepanovich was in league with his son, the Communist, and that both the precious rogues betrayed the masters who respectively paid them. The younger Stepanovich, I found, officially sold jewels for the Soviet Government, and at the same time unofficially, and without suspicion, disposed of his father's ill-gotten gains. But the younger Stepanovich had apparently other irons in the fire, for there were references both to X and U.S.A. What these connexions were could not be determined from the papers that had been seized.

It was the following page from a letter, however, which principally concerned me.

> ——is always to be preferred to a bullet, and a Milanese blade of the Quatrocento is better than anything they can turn out in Sheffield. It is, however, far too valuable to be left in a body. Who was the fool? But there, I don't

want to know. Don't tell me. When I handed that dagger to you it was that you might give it to Brown for Bolton. If you did so, I have not yet had my cheque. It's a nuisance. The dagger is known, and sooner or later the fools of police will suspect me. Of course they won't be able to prove anything, but I cannot afford to be suspected. That means I may have to retire to Paris or Cannes. It would be most annoying when the Browns have introduced me to all the right people, so that I can buy the real stuff at very, very reasonable prices. The Browns, it is true, want higher commissions so perhaps the time——

The fragment was found in a blotter. It was written on both sides of a piece of paper numbered 2 and 3. It was, therefore, probably omitted by accident from a letter which consisted of at least five pages. I guess it was addressed to Alexander Stepanovich, and that his father will ultimately discover that Scotland Yard can do more than suspect. I don't think he will see either Paris or Cannes for a considerable time.

PART FIVE

Saturday

CHAPTER I

On reaching the Yard this morning I did not find any fresh information about the murder mystery, and I sat down to consider the evidence I had so far obtained. There were two problems which I could not at present solve.

I.—Who had the dagger from Wednesday night, when old Stepanovich stole the dagger, to Tuesday morning, when it was found imbedded in the back of Wiel?

II.—What were the relations of the Triple Mac with the various people who were under suspicion.

Failing to construct a coherent story, I put down what I knew of each person separately.

Mckinley M. Macmillan.—A successful and unprincipled financier, with a reputation for doing the unexpected. He is suspected of dealing with the Soviet Government with a view to obtaining concessions. His confidential clerk, Max Wiel, has absconded with a large sum of money and a number of compromising papers. The American police know

about the money, but Macmillan has not, apparently, dared to let it be known that he has lost the papers. That does not mean he will not try to recover them. Has Wiel been murdered for them, and were they in the black bag? Why is Macmillan coming to Europe?

Robert Hugh Bolton.—Evidently a clever young man with great social gifts. He is, according to Karl Wiel, Macmillan's agent in Europe. He is interested in art, and so has dealings with Stepanovich, senior. He is also engaged, and, according to Wiel, in love with the Princess Propotkin. Has he been betraying Russian exiles as Wiel has suggested to Festonen, and has he murdered the man to prevent his own exposure? That seems reasonable, especially as the black bag was found in his room. On the other hand, has he got the papers? If so, for what has Stepanovich paid Wiel £500, and why was Bolton, spick and span, regarding the corpse at six o'clock the following morning. Lastly, why did he not leave the country at once?

William Brown and his wife, ex-convicts, had been useful to Stepanovich in bringing him into connexion with burglars. Why had Brown been recommended to Bolton as a valet? Did Stepanovich wish to spy on Bolton? Did Stepanovich and Bolton both believe that the other was an honest enthusiast, or was Brown an intermediary? Stepanovich, junior, was to have handed the dagger to Brown for Bolton, which looks as if Bolton did not know the relations of father and son. If Brown had the dagger did he

murder Wiel? If so, what could his motive have been?

Stepanovich, junior, had the dagger from his father, and his father, not having received his cheque, did not believe that it had been passed on to Bolton. But Stepanovich had paid Wiel £500. What for? If not for all the papers, perhaps it was for some of them?

It seems, then, that he had no motive for the murder, and if he had committed it, why did he leave £500, which could be traced to him, on the body? The employment of Mrs. Brown to get the money back, was evidently an afterthought.

Max Wiel, the absconding clerk—a man too clever by half. From his brother's account he was on the double cross, and meant to trade with both sides. He sold, let us suppose, some papers to Stepanovich, junior, and meant to sell the others to Festonen, not knowing that Festonen confided in Stepanovich, senior. But why, if the papers compromised Bolton, did he not go to him? It seemed obvious that from Bolton he might have obtained better terms. Lastly, did Wiel inspire the paragraphs in the *Daily Intelligence*. If so, it seems that he meant to get money from Macmillan direct.

CHAPTER II

I HAD arranged that Mander should send his report from Harlech by the morning train, but I did not expect it would contain much. Billy might or might not discover the Stepanoviches at Brighton. That was a rash speculation. There seemed nothing for me to do but to try and learn more about the younger Stepanovich. So I went across the Yard to Inspector Westley, who knows all about Communists and their activities.

He was interested to hear that Stepanovich had returned to England, and made a note of it. He had left England with his own Russian passport, and must have come back with a British one. Otherwise he would have been informed. This deserved attention.

"How did you know he was leaving England?"

"Intelligence reached us from a Communist hostel in Soho, so one of our men was at Victoria to see him off."

"Where's the hostel?"

"In Charteris Street, just off Greek Street—Number 5."

"And who is your friend? I should like to meet him."

"He gets a weekly screw from us. If you want to see him, he won't come here. You must get him to visit you at Brixton."

"Will you fix him up? I shall be in Lavender Gardens at nine to-night."

"Murder is not in his contract. He's political. He will expect 'Expenses' on a liberal scale."

"Right! What do you say to my visiting the hostel?"

"I don't think you will discover much. We raided it last week."

"I should not visit it as an inspector, but, say, a diamond merchant."

"Can you play the part?"

"Well I think I will try."

CHAPTER III

First, I had a business card printed—Messrs. Solomon & Jones, Diamond Merchants, with an appropriate address. Then I visited a friend in Hatton Garden and received some useful notes about prices, Amsterdam and de Beers. I also collected from my friend's waste paper basket some business letters in Dutch with printed headings. A paper fastener made them look important. Next I went home and, with white paper and sealing-wax, made up three very small parcels containing coal, and then I packed them all into an attaché case and started for 5 Charteris Street.

The house had the forlorn dignity of an eighteenth century mansion which has become dilapidated, but it had an electric bell, and the instant I touched it the door opened. You are not kept waiting at 5 Charteris Street. I imagine its usual occupants may sometimes be in a hurry to get within.

The lady who opened the door was immensely stout, there was no getting by her. Nor did she look like standing on one side.

"Is Mr. Stepanovich at home?" I asked.

"There's no one of that name here," she said, and would have shut the door in my face only my foot was in the way.

"That's very awkward," I said. "Mr. Stepanovich came to see me on very important business last week. I have found a customer for him and he has gone away."

"Did he give you this address?" she asked suspiciously.

"No," said I, "but I've found it out, and now can you tell me where he is?"

"No, I can't," said she.

I tendered my professional card before asking: "Can I come in and write a note, which you might be kind enough to forward."

"I am not paid for that sort of work," she said.

"Oh! that will be all right," said I, producing my wallet.

"Well, you go home and write your letter. If you send it here, I'll see that it is forwarded."

"My good woman, there isn't time. I should prefer to send a wire if you could let me have the address."

"I will send the wire, if you write out what you want said."

"Then may I come in and write it?"

"All right, I can see no harm in that."

So I went in, and I left my hat and attaché case in the hall. Then I followed the stout lady up uncarpeted stairs and was shown into a luxurious

room on the first floor full of beautiful things. Mr. Stepanovich might be a Communist, but he was a Communist of taste, and he did not live a communal existence in 5 Charteris Street.

"We have to be careful here," said the fat lady. We were raided by the police last week. The gentlemen who live here have opinions of their own—and why not? Isn't this a free country? I don't think!"

"I don't know about that. Diamonds have no politics. That's what my partner Solomon says. Are the stones good? We don't ask who sells them. We aren't interested in politics. Good heavens! woman, I left my attaché case downstairs."

"I'll fetch your case. You write your wire."

"But—but——"

"Nobody will touch the thing, bless you! There's nobody in the house." Then, fearing she might have made a mistake, she added: "That is, Comrade Wulf may be in any minute."

Downstairs went the lady, and round the room went I. I reckoned on the stout lady looking through the attaché case, and that I should have five minutes. I should not have been sorry if she had gone off with it and given me the chance of a leisurely search. I found all the drawers locked, no papers, a clean blotting pad. I peeped into the bedroom. Everything there was in order, but I spied one old wash-leather glove, a right hand glove with a dark brownish stain across the palm. It went into my pocket at once—was it blood?

Then, opening the door, I went out on to the landing, and there was the fat lady coming upstairs with the attaché case.

"I thought you were never coming," I said taking it from her.

"You don't expect a person of my weight to run."

I opened the attaché case, nothing was missing, but everything was disarranged. I took out my writing pad and wrote on it:

> Neuman approves stones and price—our commission 10 per cent. Confirm by letter. Solomon-Jones.

"There's the wire," I said, and I put down a Treasury note for a pound. I then added: "I hope Mr. Stepanovich is not abroad."

"That don't make much difference in time if you telegraph."

"But you see from the wire the bargain has to be confirmed by letter, and time is short."

"It'll be his fault if he loses a good deal."

"But, woman, don't you see we shall lose our commission—a big sum."

"I expect then the bargain will go through, and you will risk it."

"If you had ever done business with Mr. Stepanovich, you'd not be likely to risk much."

The woman smiled but said nothing, so I went on irritably,

"When he saw us on Saturday he ought to have said if he were going away. When did he go?"

"I don't remember. Gentlemen in this house are always coming and going, they don't generally say where."

"You're sure he is not in Brighton?"

Did I note the flicker of an eyelid? I wasn't sure, but the woman answered stolidly, "I don't know where he may be."

"Then how can you send my wire?"

"I have a friend who will know his address."

"Only fools," I said irritably, "mix up diamond selling with politics. I suppose the police are after him. The man's a fool."

"I see, sir."

"He does know all about diamonds, I'll own that."

"And you know all about diamonds, too, sir?"

"I'm a diamond merchant."

"Then perhaps you can tell me about this one."

The woman brought out a purse from under her skirt and took from it a diamond ring. For a moment I faltered, but it occurred to me that if I knew nothing of the subject no more did the fat lady. So I took the ring to the window, scrutinised it closely and returned it to her with a smile.

"Very pretty, and very clever," I said.

"What?"

"That fake. It would take in a good many."

"Well, Mr. Stepanovich thinks it real."

"How do you know what Mr. Stepanovich thinks?"

"He said so."

"Ah yes! but he did not offer *me* that diamond?"

The fat lady by this time was almost apoplectic with anger and suspicion.

"If the man's had me, I'll have him, and he'll swing for it. The cheating swine!"

"You only swing if you commit murder," said I; "and then it's not a swing but a drop."

"Don't you take me up like that; I'll find out the truth before I'm an hour older; and if he's cheated me, I'll go down to Brighton and give the show away."

"You go to a jeweller's and inquire first of all," said I, "and remember to send off my wire at once."

With that I took up my attaché case and departed, to send Billy a wire to meet the train arriving at six, and if a very fat woman came by it to follow her. The diamond might be genuine, but as a gift from Stepanovich it very likely was not.

CHAPTER IV

As soon as I returned to the Yard, I went to the room of our expert, and, producing the wash-leather glove, asked, "those stains, are they human blood?"

He looked at the glove attentively, and then at me, and said "No, wet paint—a man of your experience, Inspector, should have seen that at a glance."

"I didn't have a scientific education."

"But you are a trained observer."

"Of men and not gloves," said I.

"A detective should know a little of everything."

"Then he might be tempted to go ahead without the expert."

"You are right there—bring everything to me."

I went away rather annoyed with myself, and the glove will not figure in my report. I record my mistake here, lest the reader should think of an uninterrupted triumph, and cease to believe in my veracity.

Back in my room I received Mander's report from Harlech, which he had contrived to send up by the guard of the morning train.

"I arrived at Harlech late at night on Thursday and obtained a room at the St. Justinian Hotel. The lounge was nearly empty, but Mr. Bolton was there and also Mr. Weit of Bond Street, the famous dealer in antiques. They talked of furniture—French furniture of the Louis Quinze period. I did not understand most of what they said, but both had good stories of fakes—some of them worth remembering by a detective.

"Mr. Bolton is a good-looking, pleasant man, but his face is somewhat sombre when in repose. His handicap at golf is one, and he has become almost a celebrity here. I had a talk with the young lady in the office this morning. She tells me that he writes to a Princess (foreign) every day, and that his letters are forwarded from Claridge's. She is impressed. This morning he received a letter which seemed to annoy him. He thrust it into his side pocket, and then wrote a long telegram. I do not know to whom it was sent, or what it contained, but I followed him to the Links, and when he hung up his coat in the club house, I hung mine on the next peg and managed to pick his pocket. I know this was incorrect, but I thought that you would approve my action. Anyhow I can send you a copy of the letter—the original was replaced.

Sir,

I hope you will forgive me, but I find it necessary to leave your service. Mr. Frost, of

whom you have heard, is very kindly trying to fix my wife and myself in a permanent situation; but we prefer, if possible, to retain our freedom of action. I have taken the liberty to pack your clothes. You need not trouble further about them.

I am, Sir, Your most respectful
and obliged servant
WILLIAM BROWN.

"William Brown is, I imagine, Mr. Bolton's servant, left at Claridge's. You will be able to discover the significance of this letter.

"Mr. Bolton has given notice that he returns to London on Monday. I shall be returning with him. I do not think it will be necessary to execute the warrant."

Mander's report did very little to further my case. It seemed, however, to prove that Bolton's interest in antiques was not simply a blind to account for his connexion with Stepanovich. I was also glad to hear that he was returning to London. It showed that he was not seriously afraid of arrest. It suggested that he had stayed in England in order to meet Macmillan. Americans have no very great belief in our English police.

CHAPTER V

I STILL had time, before going home, to visit Claridge's, and when I found myself in the manager's room, I found the manager very much annoyed.

"Mr. Bolton's valet left the hotel two evenings ago with a good deal of his master's luggage; he gave us a bogus address, and showed them in the office a bogus telegram."

"Sir Walter Gerrans, Bt., The Manor, Aldersford."

"Why, you know all about it."

"Yes, the man who was watching Brown outside, came round here and found that out half an hour after he escaped."

"You were having him watched and never told me."

"I came round here with a search warrant the other morning. That ought to have put you on your guard."

"I thought you were after Mr. Bolton."

"Suspicious people sometimes have servants not above suspicion."

"You knew all the time who Brown was?"

"Yes, he is an ex-convict, I got him four years for his work at Aldersford Manor. He told me

he was living an honest life, but I had him shadowed."

"You ought to have told me."

"You see I wanted to have him where I could lay hold of him. As it is he got the wind up and has gone. I wish I knew where."

"Well, I've had a wire from Mr. Bolton asking what has become of Brown, and ordering us to put the matter into the hands of the police. We've done so. You won't come out of it well if we put you into the witness box."

"You won't do it. Mr. Bolton will not want me in the witness box."

"Have you anything really against Bolton?"

"I have a warrant for his arrest. He assumed a false name, and gave a false address when he was discovered with the murdered man in Bolter's Court."

"It was foolish. I've read the account of the inquest. There's nothing in that."

"Perhaps not, but there was the black shiny bag in his bedroom. I you bet Brown has not removed that."

"You're right. What am I to do?"

"Nothing. Mr. Bolton, as you know, is at Harlech. I think he will arrive here on Monday afternoon. One of my men, quite inconspicuous, will be in the hall. He will keep me informed over the telephone. There may or may not be developments. It will be a little excitement for you and your guests."

"Damn it, Inspector, we don't need advertisement. I think the conduct of the police perfectly scandalous."

As I went out a superbly groomed gentleman came down the stairs and passed into the lounge. "You know who he is," said I to the manager. "You've heard plenty about him—so has Scotland Yard. He's not been caught yet. He's in the position of Mr. Brown. We have an eye on him also. Do you really expect Scotland Yard to tell you all they know about your guests? It's unreasonable."

CHAPTER VI

I RETURNED home to have a row with my wife. I had to explain to her that another of our evenings would be spoilt, and that I should have a visitor in the study at nine o'clock.

"I will *not* have my house a haunt of criminals. If you choose to spend your days in their concerns, you may; but I insist on the home where I live being respectable."

"I didn't say my visitor was a criminal, but he shares your dislike, and shuns Scotland Yard."

"Is he a desperate conspirator?" asked my youngest daughter.

"No! I should say that he is a sham conspirator, which is really a more dangerous occupation."

"What do you mean?"

"It is always dangerous to pretend to be what you are not. Haven't I been a diamond merchant this afternoon, and I was jolly nearly caught out."

"Oh, Daddy, tell us about it—how thrilling!"

"I trust, Austin, you will do nothing of the sort. Girls' heads nowadays are full enough of these shocking shockers, and haven't I worked hard to bring up my children to respect their

father and not to think of him as a dressed up guy?"

"All right, my dear—Mum's the word"—but I winked at my youngest daughter, and she knew Mummy's word was not quite final.

"And now, Austin, you will have to open the door yourself. I am responsible for my maid, a motherless girl, and I am bound to protect her from contamination with undesirable persons."

"That's all right, Mother. I daresay my visitor has no wish to be seen by any unnecessary person."

CHAPTER VII

THERE was certainly nothing furtive about my visitor's approach. He rang the bell with violence, and followed it up with a resounding knock at the door. I closed the parlour door and opened the one on to the street. My visitor entered, and there was nothing furtive about him. A jovial, fat man, with a red face and real red hair, grey eyes, a tip-tilted nose, and a humorous mouth. He wore a quite noticeable check suit, with a red tie, and carried a serviceable blackthorn in his capable hands.

"Here I am," he said as he entered my study, "that crafty-faced son of a fox, old Westley, said you wanted to see me."

"That's all right," said I. "You are Mr.——"

"Healey for this evening, if it's all the same to you."

"That will do. What's in a name? My friend, Inspector Westley, thought you might be kind enough to give me a little information."

"With all the pleasure in life, sir—but you know the conditions. That my expenses, Five Pounds, are paid beforehand—a man must live—and that

you understand I never appear in court—a man must protect his means of livelihood. I'm frank you see, and I can be trusted to deliver the goods. Ask old Westley."

Rather reluctantly I counted out the notes which Mr. Healey pocketed with a casual nod of thanks and then went on: "It's a long way to Brixton, and I walked just to save you further expenses; and I am the man for confessing when I'm hot and thirsty."

Responding to this hint, I produced whisky and a syphon. Mr. Healey filled his glass chiefly with the former, and remarking, "Here's to your honour's health," gulped it down.

"I think, Mr. Healey, I have both seen and heard you in Hyde Park."

"I should hope so. It's difficult not to hear me when I get going, and as for the patter, I can hold a bigger crowd than most—and, what's more, keep them happy by the hour. No man alive earns his pay for the great Communist cause better than I do. I never stop wondering why the Red Terror doesn't start at once. Begorrah! there would be the devil to pay if the London boys had a spice of the Devil in them. But oratory, sir, is a wonderful gift, even if it is only used as an innocent recreation!"

"And then, as a matter of business, you supply Inspector Westley with information."

"And what for no, sir? Don't we enjoy the making of plots, but what would conspiracies be if it were not for the informer—it would be a dirty game.

You see, it's like this—every blessed thing is arranged for a regular hell, and three out of four would back out of it if they dared. Then I save them. They mostly get away, one comrade perhaps, with no sense, doesn't, and he gets six months as a political offender—and that's a deal better than being hanged. And isn't he proud when he comes out of prison, and won't he be able to write it down in his reminiscences.? No! conspiracies need a sensible informer. Then the boys get all the diversion of making the plots, and there's no harm done."

"I suppose the raid last week on Charteris Street was because of you, and failed because of you."

"Failed, did you say? Not it! Half the comrades are enjoying themselves by flying to the ends of the earth. Didn't I help the General—at least, he's the General that is to be—to get away. You should have seen him running down Greek Street with me at his tail, saying: 'They are gaining on you,' when there wasn't a bobby in sight."

"Mr. Stepanovich didn't run away."

"He wasn't there, bless you. He comes with the money and the plans. Then when things get dangerous he's off. It was a quiet house Mr. Stepanovich returned to Saturday."

"You were there, however, but I don't suppose you share his rooms."

"Ah! you've been there, have you? No! Stepanovich, the dirty hound, lives by himself, but he pays regularly, and the pay is good."

"He returned on Saturday, you say."

"Yes he did, and he was in a mighty hurry to get away on Tuesday morning."

"Anything happen on Saturday?"

"A little rat of a man came to see him on Saturday night about eleven o'clock, carrying a black bag, and he was a long time in Stepanovich's room. As I couldn't hear anything at the door, I waited on the stairs up above smoking my pipe. Presently the man with the black bag came out and ran down the stairs. A minute afterwards Stepanovich hurried out shouting 'there's a paper missing.' The little man stopped a minute and shouted back 'that's an extra, you will hear about that in time.' Stepanovich had a long knife in his hand, and he was going to throw it, but I stopped him, saying 'This house is too well known to be a convenient place for a murder.' He cussed me, the accursed Jew, and went back into his room for his hat. Out he went into the street by the front door, and out I went by the side entrance, but, bless you, he was too clever for me, and got away."

"What time did he return?"

"About two hours afterwards—very quietly; and in the morning he went abroad."

"But he's come back."

"The more fool he. He hasn't come to Charteris Street."

"Know where he is?"

"I don't, but Margaret does—only she won't tell."

"Margaret! Is that what the fat lady is called? Well, is she fond of him?"

"Blest if I know. Margaret is almighty well paid. She's a shrewd old girl, and knows on which side her bread is buttered."

"But a man like you could get it out of her."

"Her husband was an Irishman. She's had enough of blarney from him, and he's had enough of her. They say she sewed him up in the sheets when he was drunk and asleep. And next morning she beat him into a jelly and left him crying blue murder. That's the sort of woman Margaret is."

"I think with your evidence I might get Stepanovich convicted of murdering the man with the black bag, though I am not yet sure that he did it."

"Bad cess to the Jew, and my holy religion makes me hate Jews; but my appearance in court would be my last appearance. I don't mind you hanging a Jew, but I want to keep alive and be useful to you, your honour, and the Comrades. I can't help loving the Comrades, especially the General, who wears red pyjamas, to make himself really terrifying when he gets out of bed. I wouldn't have had him taken even if the *Daily Intelligence* offered me hundreds for writing his horrible adventures."

"Are you going back to Charteris Street?"

"Yes, it's a comfortable house, and the Comrades will be coming back one by one to make another

conspiracy. Moscow doesn't pay if we don't keep going."

"Then, if you hear of Stepanovich let me know."

"It may be rather expensive," said Mr. Healey. "What's the time? Why, the pubs will be closed. May I trouble your honour for another drink?"

PART SIX

Sunday

CHAPTER I

I DON'T like work on Sunday, and Mrs. Frost does not approve of it, but escaping murderers have no scruples, and the police cannot allow them the chances of a day. Besides, in this case, I believed that the Triple Mac, a hustler *in excelsis*, was expected in London on Monday, and I, at anyrate, thought it necessary to clear up the mystery before his arrival, for I was convinced that the great financier was vitally connected with the matter, and I had no wish that he should complicate matters.

In consequence, the first thing I did was to visit once more 10 Tavistock Terrace, and a very sulky and untidy Doris opened the door.

Mrs. Ransom did not receive me graciously. She reminded me that the hour was ten o'clock, and in the polite world it was not the hour for calling; secondly that she had already given me all the information in her power, so that my coming again was a reflexion on her veracity; thirdly that the day was Sunday, and that, detective or no detective, she intended to go to church. Even widows with no one to protect them had their rights, and even

poor widows could not be deprived of the consolations of religion.

When she had finished, and the harangue was lengthy, I remarked: "My dear Madam, I have no wish to inconvenience you, neither do I wish to ask you any further questions. You entirely satisfied me on Wednesday afternoon. I have come here in the hope of seeing Mr. Wiel, and I feared lest he should have gone to church had I called at a later hour."

"Mr. Wiel has not yet come downstairs. It is Sunday, and on Sunday many gentlemen are late."

"Then, Madam, if you will tell me the number of his room I will venture to disturb him."

"I shall do no such thing," said Mrs. Ransom with temper. "There is a chair in the hall, and you may sit on that if you like until Mr. Wiel descends."

"It does not look very comfortable, and you may have heard that the Law brooks no delays. So, if you will not give me the number I must explore the house until I find Mr. Wiel."

Hereupon Lizzie burst on the scene, crying:

"Don't you give way, Ma! You stick to it."

"I have no need to be instructed in my duty by you."

"I am only backing you up."

"I have no need of your support. If this policeman comes in the name of the King, any request he makes must be considered, and his demands

weighed against my duty to the gentlemen who are my guests."

"Well, Ma, if you let that man bounce you——"

"How dare you, Miss! Keep your vulgar tongue quiet! Mr. Inspector, Mr. Wiel is in Number 9, and I hope you will satisfy him that I have made the necessary inquiries concerning your authority."

I bowed to Mrs. Ransom, and thanked her for her courtesy. I almost felt inclined to thank Lizzie for her interference. Of course I had known the number from Billy, but I had no wish to acknowledge that source of information.

CHAPTER II

As I entered Number 9 Mr. Wiel was shaving, and when he saw me he cut his chin. I apologised for my unannounced intrusion, and he gibbered and spluttered through the soap.

"I told you, Mr. Wiel, that you had no cause for alarm. So when you have finished shaving we will sit down and have a chat."

There was only one bedroom chair in the room, and I thought the bed looked more comfortable. So I sat on that. Wiel's hand shook so much that he had to give up all pretence of shaving. He removed the soap in part from his face, and sat down with anxious eyes fixed on me.

"It is much nicer having a talk with you at home than in Mr. Festonen's office. We can here think of him as Goggle Eyes without noticeable disrespect."

"Oh, please sir, forget that letter. I tried to save Max, and failed."

"I can't forget the letter, because I am resolved to bring the man who stabbed your brother to justice."

"But if you did, they might murder me."

"Not they! What would they get by it? Nothing but a rope. Your brother was murdered because he had papers which would ruin or compromise other people. You had, I presume, nothing to do with it."

"Nothing, sir. You see, sir, I am not clever and I am not brave. It would not do for me to be anything but honest. I always have been honest—Mr. Festonen knows that. It was different with Max. He always had such wonderful plans. He meant to be as rich as the Triple Mac. He was too daring—that was all."

"Did you ever see the papers which he brought to England."

"No, sir. He wanted to show them to me, but I thought it safer not."

"But you know whom they concerned, and what your brother meant to do with them."

"Well, sir, I would rather not say—I'm afraid."

"Mr. Wiel, if you won't be frank with me you will get into trouble with the British Government, and the British Government is even more powerful than the Triple Mac."

"I know it. Yes, that's quite true! Oh, I wish I knew what to do for the best. How I wish Max had not come to me."

"He came. He's dead. What you say now can't hurt him. Any shuffling now will only hurt you."

"You will keep me safe, sir! Oh, what's that?"

"That is Lizzie listening at the key-hole," said I.

The door opened suddenly, and Lizzie, with a scarlet face, looked in. "You're a liar!" she said.

"Go to church and repent," said I.

"Go to hell," screamed Lizzie.

"Where are you, Lizzie," called Mrs. Ransom from downstairs. "You are keeping me waiting. When I was young——"

"Coming, Ma. Don't excite yourself."

"Good-bye, dear," said I, and Lizzie went.

"Now," said I, "we shall not be further interrupted, so you may as well tell me all you know."

"But I don't know how to begin," said the wretched man, and he didn't; and it was only after an hour and a half's cross-examination that I got out of him sufficient information to draw up the following statement which he most reluctantly signed next day:

> Max Wiel was the confidential clerk of Mckinley M. Macmillan, and he absconded from Milwaukee in March with 20,000 dollars and a mass of private papers. He came straight to England, and then went to Paris to see the younger Stepanovich and Bolton. Failing there to come to terms with them, he had followed them to England, where he met his death.
>
> The papers all referred to negotiations with the Soviet government. Macmillan was anxious to obtain vast concessions, but the correspondence

involved politics as well as business. Macmillan had been able to supply the Soviet with much valuable information about diplomatic relations, and about the plans of Russian exiles. He professed a violent antipathy to Imperialistic Britain, and promised that if the concessions were granted he would be able to inflict a terrible blow on British trade. He had already made a large contribution towards forming communistic cells in English works, and he was ready to guarantee the secret importation of arms as soon as the first profits accrued from the concessions.

Max Wiel had no intention of disposing of all these papers to a single person or power. He scorned his brother's suggestion of handing them all over to Festonen. There were three or four letters which the Soviet were eager to recover, for, owing to change in policy and personnel, they wished to back out of certain promises they had made to Macmillan. The younger Stepanovich, as an accredited Soviet agent, was willing to buy them, but he and Wiel could not agree on the price. The one wanted £1,000, and the other only offered half that amount. Finally, Wiel hit on the daring plan of accepting Stepanovich's offer, and then trying, by sleight of hand, to abstract one of the papers.

Two letters among these papers mentioned Bolton as supplying information from Paris about the plans of Russian exiles. Bolton had

made a very large fortune on the Bourse, speculating with inside knowledge. He was therefore in a position to pay a large sum. Wiel, however, did not know whether Bolton was still Macmillan's agent in Europe or on his own. Again he did not know whether he was pursuing Princess Propotkin for love or merely for information. If Bolton was really in love his happiness depended on being able to suppress the letters. If he were not, he might argue that as the scandal was inevitable the letters were of no particular interest. Bolton had declined to treat separately for the letters, and in consequence Wiel had decided to hand them over to Festonen.

On the other hand both Bolton and Stepanovich were ready to offer £5,000 if Wiel would give them the whole of the papers he had stolen. Both professed to be acting for the Triple Mac, but Wiel was not sure if one or other was not simply acting for himself. Since Bolton came to England, a man named Brown had been used as intermediary, and Wiel had no doubts about him. He knew that he had been recommended to Bolton by the elder Stepanovich, and was quite certain he was ready to betray everybody. Finally, Wiel had discovered that Stepanovich knew exactly what the papers contained, and would not pay £5,000 unless all were returned. Bolton was not so well informed, and would pay

for the whole, and receive only a selection. So he thought of making terms with Bolton for £5,000 after settling with Stepanovich and Festonen.

On the other hand, Wiel was very afraid of Bolton, and not at all afraid of Stepanovich. He thought he could cheat them both, but he understood the Jew and did not understand the American.

Having pumped Karl dry, I could not help remarking:

"A precious rascal! That's what your brother was."

"Oh no, sir, you must not say that. Max was poor through no fault of his own, and he wanted to be rich—we all do. Besides that, he was clever. He was born so. He could make plans and he had the daring to carry them out. Very few men have been clever enough to rob Mr. Macmillan or have had the nerve to get away with it."

"It does not seem to have done him much good."

"I know, sir. He was rash, but we all have our faults. Again and again I have told him that cross dealing was dangerous. It is, isn't it, sir? I kept saying Safety First. That is what all the best people say."

"And, Wiel, there's only one way of being safe, and that's by being honest."

"I know, sir. That is why I am an honest man."

"You think so, but it seems to me that if you had not been a coward you might have belonged to the criminal classes. As it is, you haven't much to fear, and might now safely shave the other side of your face. At present you look lop-sided!"

CHAPTER III

As I came away I could not help being sorry for the wretched man I had left. He certainly had no moral sense where money was concerned, but I was impressed by his pathetic admiration for his brother's cleverness and daring, and by the loyalty which he showed to his memory.

When I reached the Yard I was told that Detective Smith wanted me on the telephone, and I eagerly rang up the number I was given.

"Is that you, Billy?"

"Yes, I am the Sweet William of the Universe Lounge. Fashion and Beauty smile on me."

"Don't be a fool over the 'phone, for the exchange girl is sure to be listening in."

"Well, sir, I received your message about the fat lady—it wasn't very precise. I awaited the six o'clock train, and there came through the barrier a dear, cushiony old dear, who could hardly waddle. I followed her, oh, so slowly, all the way to a Vicarage gate where three children came out crying 'Grannie,' and were hugged in succession. I can tell you the name of the Vicarage, but I fear she was not the fat lady you had 'bracelets' for."

"She evidently wasn't."

"Next, with the intelligent aid of the Brighton police, I have been running all over the place to look at the children of Israel, but they all turned out to be nice, rich, pleasant-looking men, who could not be mistaken for the once bearded Stepanovich or his oleaginous son."

"Where did you pick up that adjective?"

"From a dictionary, sir, but we must not bore the young lady at the exchange, who is listening in, with dictionary definitions."

"Shut up, Billy—have you found them?"

"No, sir, the scent is faint but I am pursuing. I have however found——"

"Who? Do get on!"

"The Browns, sir. I had not been to church as the Stepanoviches belong to the Synagogue which does not meet on Sunday. The Browns had been to church, and I saw them coming out—models of Sunday propriety. Brown really looks jolly well in Bolton's clothes, and Mrs. B., as you know, has style. After church they took two turns on the front—and I wish people wouldn't turn when I am following them. They have just gone into the Kent Hotel for lunch. The Kent Hotel is small, expensive and quiet. I just went in after them to inquire about the tariff. The manager looked at me and said they were full up, were always full up. Didn't know when he could promise me a room. It's a place intended for 'Dugouts', Dowagers and the

Browns. Now I am quite at home at the Universe among the gay and giddy throng—a lovely lady asked me if I were in the Guards. Eh? What do you think of that?"

"That is quite irrelevant. You keep an eye on the Browns. I shall come down by the afternoon train with Roberts and Ford and arrest them. There's a warrant out for Brown—taken out by the manager of Claridge's, and we will soon have one for Mrs. Brown for 'receiving'. She was in with old Stepanovich, and went off with the jewelry. Properly managed, we shall get from them to our Jewish friends. They are all on the double cross, and, when cornered, will split on one another."

CHAPTER IV

Detective Roberts and Ford were very disappointed when I decided on going to Brighton by train. They would have so much preferred racing down there in a fast police car, but I intended returning with my prisoners in comfort.

Billy was on the platform to meet us, but we passed through the barrier separately and proceeded each by himself to police headquarters. The first person I met outside the station was the fat lady of Charteris Street, whom Billy had failed to identify. I saw him cross to the other side of the road in order to observe our meeting.

"An unexpected pleasure," said I.

"You were wrong about that ring. It's real, and a Bond Street man gave me fifty quid for it."

"I congratulate you," said I.

"And don't you come buying diamonds in Charteris Street again, for you may not find it a healthy locality."

"I came to make your acquaintance."

"And you didn't get much out of me, did you?"

"You were discretion itself! But you did mention Brighton, didn't you? and so I am here."

"And you think you will find Comrade Stepanovich. Well, he's not here, I don't mind telling you that much."

"Perhaps if I stick to you I may find him yet."

"Well, I'm going up to town. Good day."

"You must allow me the pleasure of seeing you off."

She made no reply but entered the station. She made straight for the barrier and only turned when she reached it. "You are on a fool's errand; he isn't here," she said.

"No matter," I replied, "but I am sorry I can't accept your invitation and travel with you to town."

I saw her enter a carriage, and I watched until the train started. For an hour or rather more, I thought, she can't communicate with Stepanovich. She had no need to tell me twice that my man was not in Brighton. She did not come down this morning merely to take a turn on the front.

CHAPTER V

THE manager of the Kent Hotel was terribly disturbed by the arrival of four detectives. He prided himself so much on knowing at once who people were, and the Browns, posing as Mr. and Mrs. Bruce, had completely taken him in. Their dress and luggage were alike, quietly perfect, they had taken a private suite as a matter of course, and ordered with discretion a simple dinner. Directly after arrival Mr. Bruce had taken from his pocket a letter addressed to some castle in Scotland, and asked that it might be posted at once. "The children," said Mrs. Bruce, "will want to know where we are." The manager had forgotten the address, but had noted that the envelope bore the stamp of Claridge's. In the morning Mrs. Bruce had inquired particularly about the churches in the neighbourhood, and explained that coming from Scotland they were not accustomed to services which were very high. They had announced their intention of staying a month, and when the manager told them that the Countess of Rowallan had come for a week and stayed six, Mrs. Bruce had remarked: "I used to know Alice Rowallan when we were

girls, but of course I have seen nothing of her since her splendid marriage. I don't suppose she would now remember me."

In fact Mr. and Mrs. Bruce had impressed the manager as nice, quiet, friendly people, who were sure of themselves, and took their surroundings for granted, and were not above chatting with a deferential manager.

"I was never more surprised in my life. It's terrible to think of the deceit there is in the world. I don't know what you gentlemen are going to do. I hope there will be no disturbance. This is a quiet hotel—Oh! I am thankful that these horrible impostors have not had time to make any acquaintances among my guests. Can they be got out of the hotel without anything being known?"

"I think so. They are not first offenders, and they will know that the game is up. Brown can be surly when collared, but I expect quite a pleasant chat with his wife on the way up to town. Now show Detective Ford and myself upstairs. You two can stay in the hall. No! one of you had better fetch two taxis. Now we are ready! Just open the door and announce Inspector Frost."

CHAPTER VI

BROWN was looking out of the window as the door opened and Mrs. Brown was resting on a sofa reading a shocker, but the shocker could not have been so thrilling as our entry.

"Good evening, Brown. I told you we should meet again shortly."

"Well, what have you got against me now?"

"I hold a warrant for your arrest for robbing your master, Mr. R. H. Bolton."

"The man must be mad. He has more to lose by an exposure than I."

"I must warn you both that anything which you say may be used in evidence against you."

"You don't mean to say that you have a warrant for me," said Mrs. Brown.

"Yes, I have! You are accused as a receiver of stolen goods."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Brown! "Why, there's my nice gardener. He will give evidence that I left Mr. Stepanovich the moment I knew about his nefarious trade."

"With his jewelry," grunted Ford.

"That was just a joke. What you call jewelry. It wasn't worth much. Only paste. Ask William."

"Don't talk so much," suggested Mr. Brown.

"Now, William, it's no good being ill-tempered. Frost and you are old friends and I am almost inclined to make love to Mr. Ford. Nothing very much is the matter. You are not the first valet who, when his master was away, dressed up in his master's clothes and took a week-end off. The Beak will smile a bit when he hears the story. In his heart he will think you quite a sport, but will have to say: 'Very foolish of you, and you must go to prison for a month.' That's it. Isn't it, Mr. Frost?"

"You are probably right to take a rosy view of the situation," said I. "And now if you will put on your things we will be going. Detective Roberts will follow with your luggage. There are two taxis waiting at the door."

Two minutes later we left the Kent Hotel with great decorum, and the highly-respectable visitors of that establishment had no knowledge about anything unusual having occurred. They were all probably as dull as usual when they met in the lounge after dinner.

CHAPTER VII

At the Brighton Police Station Brown and his wife were searched. Nothing incriminating was found on the latter. On Brown was a good deal of money and some trinkets of considerable value. However, all that interested me were two neatly folded letters which were discovered in his inner pocket.

They were letters addressed to a Soviet commissar. Each began, "Mr. Bolton, my agent in Paris informs me, etc." They were typewritten, but corrected in a bold handwriting, and the heading of the paper bore the name of Mckinley M. Macmillan. They were evidently drafts of letters which were to be re-typed and sent.

"Any explanation?" I asked Brown.

"None," he replied.

"These drafts were improperly kept by Max Wiel," I said.

"Who's he?" asked Brown.

"The man who was murdered in Bolter's Court last Monday."

"Oh!" said Brown, trying to make the Oh sound as an Oh of indifference, and not quite succeeding.

"I suppose you kept them in order to blackmail your master?"

"To return them to him, sir."

"Nothing more to say?"

"Nothing."

Billy and I travelled up to town with Brown, but he sat in a corner of the carriage, pulled his hat over his eyes and pretended to sleep. He was no doubt puzzling what he should do.

Mrs. Brown travelled with Ford, and was quite lively. She tried to persuade him that until he appeared she had no knowledge that there was anything wrong about 4 Acacia Villas. It was true she had been in trouble, and so at once recognised him as a tec. "I knew if you were about, old Stepanovich couldn't be on the straight, so I just cleared out. The letter—you mustn't take that seriously. It was just my high spirits. I couldn't help it, though William has often said, 'You mustn't be funny with policemen. They have no sense of humour'."

CHAPTER VIII

It was quite late at night when Brown sent for me because he had decided to make a statement. I went with Billy, who is an excellent stenographer, to receive it; and here it is.

I came out of prison six months ago and found my wife settled as housekeeper to an old gentleman named Stepanovich residing at 4 Acacia Villas, South Hampstead. I had no reason for believing that he was not as respectable as he looked. He knew about my past, and was most benevolent in his professed intentions to start me once again, as I desired, in an honest career. I was exceedingly grateful to him when he found me a place as valet to an American gentleman who had come to London for the season.

Here, to my surprise and consternation, I found myself involved in horrible intrigues. First, whenever I visited my wife at Hampstead, Mr. Stepanovich questioned me closely about Mr. Bolton's affairs, and movements. He insisted on my bringing him copies of letters,

especially those from Princess Propotkin. I was in the power of Stepanovich; I could not help myself. I felt the degradation which brought me down to the level of a mere detective.

Secondly, Mr. Bolton employed me to carry letters to a foreigner named Wiel. His letters were always sealed so I cannot say what they contained. I met Wiel at a low and unsuspected Night Club in the City. It was there I met the son of Mr. Stepanovich, a man of about forty who told me that Wiel was a thief, who had taken advantage of a position of trust and robbed his master—an American named Macmillan. He also told me that Mr. Bolton was a crook who had been an agent of Macmillan but was dismissed for swindling, and that he was now anxious to get Wiel's papers that he might hold Macmillan to ransom. Stepanovich proposed that I should help him to get possession of the papers on behalf of the Russian Government and Mr. Macmillan whom they alone concerned. He said Mr. Macmillan was a man of vast wealth and would be most generous.

I might have helped him if he had not been a Communist, but I have always voted Conservative, and stood for law and order, though I have to confess that under the stress of peculiar temptations I have not always been able to act

up to my standard. You do not know how I felt my position; I seemed day by day to be getting more involved with people from whom I longed to escape.

On Monday night Mr. Bolton sent me with a letter to Wiel and with instructions not to let him go until I had received the papers. He said that Mr. Macmillan had offered £5,000 reward for the man who brought him the papers. He looked at me in such a way that I was quite sure he was tempting me to murder Wiel. As if I should do such a silly thing for a promise when I could not claim fulfilment!

I went to the Night Club and Wiel was not there. I waited two hours and then walked up Bank Street. Suddenly I heard a policeman's whistle. A constable, who was coming towards me answered it, turned and ran up the street. A second afterwards the younger Stepanovich rushed out of Bolter's Court carrying a black bag. The police whistles had altogether rattled him. He thrust the black bag into my hands, saying 'Give it to your master. The man found with that bag will swing for it. I would rather he did than I.' With that he ran down the street and disappeared.

What was I to do? You may be sure I did not want to keep the black bag longer than

necessary. I looked inside. Some of the papers were in Russian. At least, I could not read them. So I hurried back to Claridge's and gave the bag to Mr. Bolton, and told him all that had occurred. He seemed pleased to get the bag, and said that Mr. Macmillan would pay me.

Next morning he went away to Harlech, leaving strict injunctions that I should not tell his address, and on Tuesday afternoon you came and recognised me. After that I was sure I was being followed, and you fairly frightened me on Thursday afternoon. What ought I to have done? I don't know now. I only wanted to get away and hide. It seemed to me that the last place anyone would look for me would be the Kent Hotel. I know it was wrong to borrow Mr. Bolton's clothes, but I had to be properly furnished for the part I intended to play. I should, of course, have returned his belongings when I had acquired things of my own. I don't think the law ought to be hard on a man with an unfortunate past, attempting to escape from a very dangerous situation.

Having heard Brown's statement, I said:

"You ask what you should have done; you should have been frank with me and confessed all this last Tuesday. You would have done still better had you told the police what was going on a fortnight ago."

"I daresay, Inspector, that you are right, but my previous relations with the police have not made it easy for me to approach them, and you must understand that, in my position, I preferred, if possible, to keep out of their sight."

CHAPTER IX

"Well, Billy," said I, "what did you think of his statement?"

"I thought it was damned cheek what he said about detectives, and bunkum about his endeavours to keep straight. Otherwise it seemed a plausible yarn."

"There's some truth in it of course. He couldn't have invented it all. The weak point in his statement is with regard to Bolton. The Triple Mac may be in London to-morrow and give us information which will make some of his statements impossible."

"The police whistle tallies with what Daniels said at the inquest."

"Yes, and it accounts for the murderer leaving the dagger in his victim's back and £500 in his pocket."

"But," said Billy, "it doesn't prove Stepanovich to have been the murderer. If friend Brown did it, he might have been rattled also, and probably he did not know of the £500."

"What I can't account for is the fact that Bolton was on the spot at six o'clock next morning. If Brown did tell him the story as he has told it to us, Bolton would have avoided the place, he wouldn't

have gone to Harlech, but straight out of the country."

"Is Bolton bluffing us?"

"Possibly! When we get Stepanovich we shall have another statement."

"When—but where is he?"

"I don't know. We do know where Bolton is, and if he does not come to London of his own accord to-morrow, Mander has orders to arrest him. We may expect a statement from him."

"And don't forget the lively Mrs. Brown. I wonder how she and Ford spooned on the way up to town. I say, shall I try to locate that Night Club to-morrow? Boston ought to know of it—ought to have known of it. It's in his division."

"Perhaps he does. It's as well sometimes to let these places go on. It enables the police to trace rogues if they know their secret haunts. I will inquire of Boston to-morrow. Meantime you might go to Brighton and find out if Brown has been trying to sell jewelry there. Be back by the mid-day train."

PART SEVEN

Monday

CHAPTER I

On Monday morning I was cracking my second egg, and my wife had just read me from the *Lady's Mirror* that the Duchess of Bedminster had returned to Berkeley Square and that Mr. Edward van Storck, a passenger on the *Mauretania,* might arrive at the Ritz Hotel that evening, when our little maid announced:

"Mr. Healey wishes to see you."

My wife put down her paper and removed her spectacles before saying: "I thought I made it quite clear that your criminals were not to come to my house."

"Quite clear, my dear. You told me, but you did not tell Mr. Healey. Also, and this is by the way, Mr. Healey has not yet qualified as a criminal."

"I will not have people connected with your horrible cases in this house. You should remember that you have daughters to consider."

"Quite so, my dear. I shall not offer to introduce them to Mr. van Storck when I have a little chat with him at the Ritz this evening."

"Well, are you going to see this Mr. Healey?"

"When I have had a little marmalade."

So saying, I finished my breakfast while Mr. Healey rested in my study.

CHAPTER II

"THE top of the morning to you, Inspector. It's the early bird, I am, and I have the worm all right—that wriggling little pot-bellied Jew—Alexander Stepanovich!"

"Is he in Charteris Street?"

"Not he! Has not fat Margaret packed all his duds and papers, and did not I, in the kindness of my heart, offer to take them round to the carrier's, and did not she, who wouldn't trust one of the blessed saints—the misbelieving heretic that she is—did not she send me out for string, and send them away, while I drank a pint of porter at the bar round the corner to her good health and conversion?"

"Do you know where he is?"

"I do, and there are not many who have been upsides with fat Meg. It's a horrible thing to find a woman who should be the light of a man's eyes, so full of suspicion. I told her the good God had given her a mouth to be kissed, and she had made it into a mouse-trap."

"How then did you find out," said I, growing a little impatient.

"There is only one thing that will open Meg's mouth and loosen her tongue, and that's to be found in a square bottle by the name of Johnny Walker. You see, sir, you behaved so handsomely to me when I had the honour of seeing you two nights ago, that I went home to think—it's a weary business, and you need a deal of refreshment. And what I thought was this. The Comrades have had enough of that misbegotten little Jew—there is no friendliness in him. He pays well, but it isn't his money. The money comes from Moscow, and the money will come all the same by another agent. I know, too, who will be in his place—the broth of a boy from the old country—I taught him myself. He's the lad for a conspiracy. He has it in his blood. Was not his father hanged for shooting a policeman, bad cess to him?

"When Pat Burke takes Comrade Stepanovich's place things will be bright and lively. Won't Moscow be pleased! The plots will be fine! I shall be pleased, too, and old ferret-faced Westley, he'll get his promotion. Lots of fun and no one a penny the worse—at least no one out of Moscow, and they will enjoy reading of our hairbreadth escapes, and the brutal conduct of the bourgeois police."

"But I want to hear about Stepanovich."

"Sure, and why shouldn't your honour hear about Stepanovich? I'm telling you now, and he won't tell you half as much truth when you meet him this afternoon. Meg went to see him yesterday at

Brighton. I wish I could have gone with her, the smell of the sea is good for a man's spirits, and the other spirit comes more kindly in consequence. It was so with Meg. She came home that pleased with herself you'd have thought that she had discovered the treasure of Brian Boru."

"And then?"

"And then she found me with a bottle of Johnny Walker almost full. I had only tasted one drop beforehand to see if it were the genuine tipple. We had a little supper first—sheep's trotters, if you must know—you Government gentlemen are so curious. Then the whisky; and before we had finished the bottle Meg was telling stories—sure, they must have been lies—of how she had got the better of a swivel-eyed detective, and what a fool he appeared as he stood all on his lonesome, looking for a man that wasn't there."

"Very amusing, no doubt," said I, keeping my temper.

"It was so. She said Stepanovich and his thieving old dad were quite all right in their warm little nest in Zenobia Square, and that they would not go out until they went for a day's outing to Boulogne a fortnight hence, and did not come back. It's a service flat, and Meg fed with them. The food she said,—you had never eaten the like of it, since Eve got indigestion through that apple—the liquor, she said, was all right, but there wasn't enough of it—and then she turned and cursed me for

drinking her health with the last of the Johnny Walker."

"Mr. Healey, I am much obliged to you."

"So you should be! Not that I am denying the sentiment does you honour. You'll have a gay and giddy time at 15 Zenobia Square, I'm thinking. Remember about the victuals, but take a flask with you. O yes! and remember this—my expenses are £10.

"A lot of money!"

"And what would you have with whisky that expensive! A thievish capitalist Government taxing the poor man's drink! Now in Russia, I'm telling you, you can get fighting drunk for almost nothing. Here's to Communism, say I—and—well, I don't much like cheques—but if you haven't enough notes, and it's Monday morning, I'll take them, and just borrow ten bob off you to see me home."

CHAPTER III

On arriving at the Yard, I sent through messages to the Brighton Police, and to Billy. I also sent down Roberts with warrants for the arrest of the two Stepanoviches. I received a wire from Mander that he and Bolton were travelling up to London by the same train, and that the latter would be at Claridge's late in the day. Then I had a consultation with the Chief about arrangements to be made, and hurried off to the police court to give evidence about the arrest of Brown and his wife. We got their cases remanded for a week, and an application for bail refused.

On returning, I heard that Billy wanted me on the 'phone.

"Yes—Billy speaking—how you must be gloating over Zenobia Square! In the directory a Mr. Michael has a flat there—he has had it for over a year. We are going to see if Mr. Michael is Mr. Michael Stepanovich directly Roberts arrives. Meantime the house is under observation. But that isn't what I rang you up for."

"What is it?"

"I reached Brighton before the shops opened, and as soon as they did I started on East Street. At

Spiridion Brothers I found out all about the Browns. I asked if anyone had been trying to sell jewelry and the proprietor smiled. He had a good story to tell, and here it is:

"On Saturday morning, a gentleman named Mr. Bruce introduced himself. His wife, he said, was the god-daughter of Lady Melton Mowbray—you know, the old girl who died two months back. She was famed for her jewels. He said his wife had inherited some of them and wished them to be valued, that some would have to be sold to pay the legacy duty. It wasn't a very good tale for they would have been valued for probate before she got them."

"Yes, but a valuation for probate is not much guide to selling value."

"No matter about that. Mr. Bruce opened an attaché case full of jewels, and there wasn't a genuine stone among them. All paste, and bad paste at that. It was all the more remarkable as the settings were, for the most part, very beautiful. Mr. Spiridion says that when he told Mr. Bruce this, he was surprised at the gentleman's language. Never before had he heard a deceased lady of title so cursed; and Mr. Bruce seemed at first such a quiet, gentlemanly man. I could not help laughing when I heard the tale, and Mr. Spiridion said he did not know why it seemed so amusing, but he had told it to two Jewish gentlemen on Saturday

afternoon, and the elder one had gone on chuckling and coughing in such a manner that he thought he would have a fit. That shows the Stepanoviches were circulating freely in Brighton until the fat lady gave them the straight tip."

"It also proves, Billy, that you were not as wideawake as you should have been or you would have spotted them."

"Never mind, sir. There will be no mistake about Zenobia Square, and this afternoon you shall bandy quips with the younger Step."

CHAPTER IV

At lunch time I received information from Southampton. Detectives had gone aboard the *Mauretania* on its arrival and identified the passengers as they passed before the doctor and the passport officials. Mr. Mckinley M. Macmillan had been the first to land, carrying his own grip. Mr. van Storck came next, carrying nothing, having left his luggage to be dealt with by his valet. Mr. Stanford and Mr. Jefferson Jones had come ashore with some three suit cases apiece. All four gentlemen had caught the express to London, and Mr. Stanford had sent a wire to Mr. Bolton at Claridge's. Full descriptions had been wired through to Waterloo so that they might be identified on arrival.

"I wonder how it will all end," said the Chief. "I feel myself a bit nervous about making a mistake."

"A lot may happen before to-morrow morning. We are to watch and listen. We've committed ourselves over the younger Stepanovich, I don't think that will involve us in difficulties."

"I have told them on the political side what we know about Macmillan's correspondence, and I wash my hands of that matter."

"I hope, sir, that they will keep me informed."

"Well, you'd better go and talk it over with Inspector Westley. Co-ordination is necessary and don't let us fail for lack of good staff work." I went.

CHAPTER V

After seeing Westley I went to the cell where Alexander Stepanovich was confined. I found him in consultation with Mr. Mosheim, his legal advisor, for whom he had wired before leaving Brighton.

When I appeared he was loud and blustering in his indignation.

"Here is my father, an old man, who has lived an honourable life for years, whose name is respected by connoisseurs, all over the world, arrested on a ridiculous charge of being a receiver of stolen goods."

"They were found in his house."

"That, I imagine, will not be disputed. It is quite possible he may have been deceived by plausible people into buying things that had been stolen. My father is a foreigner and not accustomed to British trickery. And then you have arrested me, who am not even in my father's business, on the flimsiest of pretexts. Mr. Mosheim will tell you I cannot be in any way liable."

"I said that I could not see how you could be liable," said Mr. Mosheim.

"Perhaps," said I , "the matter may be clearer to Mr. Mosheim hereafter, but I have not come about

the charge of 'receiving' which proceeds from the police of the Hampstead division. I have come for information about Max Wiel who was murdered in Bolter's Court last Monday night."

Did Alexander Stepanovich falter? At any rate he did not answer. He looked at me and then at his solicitor, and it was the latter who spoke.

"Do I understand that you are going to prefer another and more serious charge against my client."

"I was wondering if your client had any statement to make. I know that he received a dagger from Mr. Stepanovich, senior, for an American named Bolton, and that the dagger was found in the back of Max Wiel. I know also that £500 in bank notes found on Max Wiel have been traced to Mr. Alexander Stepanovich. The connection between the two facts needs some explanation."

"It will no doubt be forthcoming, but I cannot allow my client to make a statement off-hand. It would not be fair to him. If Mr. Stepanovich has any statement to make I will send it you in due course."

"I should like to have it this afternoon and as soon as possible. Otherwise your client will be charged with murder to-morrow morning."

At half-past four Mr. Mosheim entered my room with a paper which he said explained everything, and he hoped I should find it satisfactory. I didn't, but here it is for the reader to judge.

I, Alexander Stepanovich, am a Russian subject. I am a Communist and an accredited agent of my Government, and I am in England on the affairs of the Soviet.

The Soviet were anxious to recover some stolen papers which were in the possession of Max Wiel, and I was commissioned to buy them. Max Wiel came to my rooms about ten o'clock on Monday night. I received the papers and paid him £500. Not trusting the British Post Office when secret Russian documents were concerned, I went to Paris on Tuesday morning and posted them from thence. I then returned to England to enjoy a quiet weekend with my aged father, who does not agree with me on politics, but still regards me as his son.

As regards the charge about the dagger. On the same Monday afternoon my father gave me the dagger, and said that he had told Mr. Bolton to send for it from my London lodgings. His reason for doing so was because he had come to suspect that Mr. Bolton's valet, who was the husband of his housekeeper, was dishonest, and in consequence he did not wish to have him about the house. The valet Brown, called on me at seven o'clock on Monday night and received the dagger, and that is all I know about it.

I know, however, that Mr. Bolton is an ardent supporter of Russian exiles, and would, if possible,

have prevented my obtaining the Soviet documents. Max Wiel, when I saw him at my lodgings, was carrying a black bag and this should be looked for.

ALEXANDER STEPANOVICH.

This statement, I told Mr. Mosheim, would have to be tested, and I did not waste any time in doing so. I went to Brown and asked him where he was at seven o'clock on Monday. He replied: "Coming back in a car from Badsey Hall, in Bucks, where we had been for the night."

"At what time did you get to Claridge's?"

"About seven-forty-five. My master had just time to dress for dinner. He was dining at the Berkeley at eight-thirty."

"What did you do then?"

"I went with two gentlemen's servants to the pictures, at that place by the Marble Arch. My orders were not to be at the Night Club, I told you of, before ten."

"And then?"

"I stayed in the Night Club until close on midnight, and then, as Wiel did not come, I strolled up Bank Street, and the rest I have told you."

"Well, Brown, I think if you can prove your story, you have saved your neck. Mr. Stepanovich states that he gave you the dagger in his lodgings at Charteris Street at seven o'clock."

"The swine! I don't know where Charteris Street is. Here, I'll give you all the names which will establish my alibi. That's watertight anyhow."

"More perhaps than some of your other statements."

"What's wrong with them?"

"That I have to discover."

I received a number of names and addresses which will have to be verified, but I am convinced beforehand, that, for once, Brown had spoken the truth. That leaves me with certain puzzles still to be solved, but will justify me in charging Alexander Stepanovich with murder to-morrow morning.

CHAPTER VI

On returning to my room I learnt that the four Americans had all arrived at Waterloo. That Mr. van Storck had gone to the Ritz, Mr. Stanford to Claridge's, Mr. Jefferson Jones to the Savoy, and Mr. Mckinley M. Macmillan to the Lammermoor, a temperance hotel in Bloomsbury.

Before I had had time to consider what I should do next, word was brought me that the concierge at the Lammermoor had rung up Scotland Yard to know when Mr. Macmillan could see the man who was investigating the Bolter's Court mystery. He wanted to see him at once. I suggested eight-thirty that evening if it did not interfere with Mr. Macmillan's dinner, and I over-heard a loud voice saying to the concierge: "Tell him I'll be right there."

Mr. Macmillan was evidently "some hustler." I wondered exactly what he wanted, but I meant first of all to interview Mr. van Storck and Mr. Bolton. The former first, for though he would have nothing to say about the murder, he might be able to throw light on Mr. Bolton and give me a lead for dealing with him.

CHAPTER VII

I FOUND Mr. van Storck occupying the most expensive suite at the Ritz. He was, as I had expected, a very elegant young man. He received me graciously. There was a nice flavour of friendliness and condescension in all that he did. I was given a seat, I was offered a cigar. Mr. van Storck touched the bell and said the one word "cocktails," when his valet opened the door. Soon that worthy reappeared with a salver holding some six glasses of different coloured drinks. I was asked to make my selection, while van Storck lamented that the American Bar of the hotel had lost its only perfect shaker.

"It's really a pleasure to meet you, Inspector. I have never hitherto seen a real detective—that is, one of your eminence. It gives me quite a thrill to think that my name has been associated with—what do your papers call it?—a mystery—but I am afraid I can't help you. New York is so far away from the scene of the crime."

"I hope, sir, that you have not been in any way annoyed because somebody took your name in vain."

"Not at all—only a little intrigued to know who the humorist was. It was, of course, a joke—and in very bad taste."

"Well, I can tell you who the gentleman is. His name is Bolton, Robert Hugh Bolton, and I believe that he usually resides in Paris."

"Bolton, you surprise me, Inspector. I have always regarded Mr. Bolton as a gentleman."

"I hope to make his acquaintance this evening. Meantime I thought that you might tell me something about him. You will understand that a detective has not your opportunities for knowing people of social importance."

"Really, Inspector, Mr. Bolton and myself are not intimate. At least there has never been any such intimacy as would warrant him in assuming my name."

"Anyhow, I may assume that you have known him sometime."

"Oh yes, for seven years at least. In fact, I don't mind confessing—I am not proud and have nothing to conceal—that seven years ago I was under an obligation to Mr. Bolton. I had been very unfortunate at a gaming-house in Paris—I was young then. I could just pay my losses, and should have had to apply for funds from my father, who abhorred all gambling outside Wall Street, if Mr. Bolton had not suggested an investment on the Bourse, by which I made 20,000 dollars in the week. Then I was all right, and had something to write home about. My father was pleased and increased my allowance.

"It seems a long time ago now—the affair is perhaps a trifle ridiculous. Mr. Bolton has, for a man moving in good society, quite a flair for profitable speculations. I know of other people whom he has put on to quite good things."

"May I suggest, sir, that after Mr. Bolton had done you this service, you introduced him into Parisian society."

Mr. van Storck flushed. "I think, Inspector, that is a little rude. I may be an American by birth, but I am not a business man. I don't make bargains or introduce people for money."

"Of course not. You misunderstand me. I ought to have put my question with more delicacy. You found Mr. Bolton a good fellow and told other people as much."

"Mr. Bolton, as far as I can remember, has always moved in the first circles. He is under no obligation to me."

"Would you be surprised if I were to tell you that Mr. Bolton was Mr. Macmillan's agent in Europe."

"After what you have told me, nothing would surprise me; but what earthly use could Bolton be to that barbarian Colossus of the Middle West."

"There are plenty of people in Paris—politicians and diplomats—who are sometimes in want of money and there are, I suppose, financiers who want early, and the best, inside information."

"What a horrible thing this desire for money is!"

"But even you, sir, have confessed to a speculation."

"What a memory you have, Inspector. I was forgetting what I had just told you. Well—that was my only flutter apart from the green tables. I really don't care about money. It is the desire of money which is a curse to my country. They hate and laugh at club men like myself over there, but we really stand for a higher conception of life. What America wants is men of leisure—men like myself who stand for a more humane view of life. It is well for America that men like myself should form links with the old world."

"I have been told that Mr. Bolton was hoping to form a permanent link with Princess Propotkin."

"A charming woman—French on her mother's side, and allied to all the best families. At present all the more charming because she is a fanatic. It is so amusing. Paris thrills with the account of her escape from Russia with the ropes of Propotkin pearls after her father's murder. She is just the rage at present."

"Then I may assume that Mr. Bolton is a lucky man."

"There will be little chance of his marriage if he is mixed up in a sordid murder. He may come back to Paris and be received as a notoriety—but people like Princess Propotkin don't marry such men."

"I see, I don't think Mr. Bolton will be accused of having any connexion with the murder, but he may be in an unpleasant position through his giving a false name and disappearing, and through other facts which have come to my knowledge. He will, I expect, want friends to testify to his character, and I was wondering if you would give evidence in his favour."

"No! I am afraid I can't do that. As I told you, Mr. Bolton and myself were never intimate. Besides, I am thinking of going to Paris to-morrow; I have most important engagements."

"I am afraid, sir, that you resent Mr. Bolton's taking your name."

"Well, I don't like it; I don't pretend to do so. But don't mistake me, Inspector. I am not a revengeful man. If Mr. Bolton marries the Princess before the end of the season, they will be asked to join me on my yacht at Cowes."

CHAPTER VIII

CANDIDLY, I did not like Mr. van Storck, who valued himself almost as highly as other people valued his wealth, and who thought himself an apostle of refinement because he squandered his father's hard earned millions in senseless self-indulgence.

I left him at the Ritz to ruminate on his social consequence, and how it might be compromised by past connexions with Bolton, and proceeded to Claridge's to meet the man whose marriage with a Princess was still problematical.

As I entered the hall a youngish man was coming hurriedly towards me with a portfolio under his arm. The detective posted in the hall gave me a wink, so that I went up to him and said:

"Mr. Bolton, I believe."

"No, my name is Stanford," he replied and passed out. I then gave a wink to my man. He understood mine better than I had understood his, and lounged out after Stanford.

I then asked to be shown up to Mr. Bolton's apartment, and had myself properly announced as Inspector Frost.

Mr. Bolton turned out to be a man rather under medium size, little and active, with a good head, smooth hair and exceptionally bright eyes He ought to have been nervous, but he did not show it. He did not await my attack but began:

"Well, Mr. Inspector, have you come to arrest me for evading you the other morning."

"Perhaps, sir, I ought to do so—the warrant is in my pocket, but a good deal depends on how you answer my questions."

"I don't know how you found me. I thought I had covered my tracks. Did Brown inform against me?"

"No—Brown's information, so far as it affects you was only obtained yesterday afternoon."

"I wonder where I made a mistake. Of course Brown informed me that you had traced me here. He didn't tell you I was at Harlech?"

"No! I found that out also for myself on Thursday."

"And then the amiable Mr. Mander arrived to look after me. I twigged him at once. He looked all right on the links, but at night in dress clothes you were sure he had been a waiter."

"You are observant," said I, rather annoyed.

"Oh! he carried it off very well. He is really a

very decent chap, and we travelled up to town to-day in the same carriage and neither of us let on to the other what each knew."

"That's all right. I did not want any unnecessary unpleasantness—at anyrate before it was time to act."

"That time has come and here I am. So fire away, Inspector, and treat me to the third degree."

"I think we shall get along best if you tell me a little about yourself."

"All right. My name is Robert Hugh Bolton. My father was a Virginian whose family had been ruined in the Civil War. My mother was French, and I was born in Paris. I say, haven't you got a notebook and don't you want to write it all down?"

"I have an admirable memory, and there may be a statement for you to sign presently—I don't know. At present I think you will probably tell your tale more freely without my scribbling. Also, I can't watch a man if I am taking down his remarks."

"That's candid! Where was I? Oh yes, I was educated at a Lycée in Paris and afterwards at Harvard. Though you mayn't believe me, Inspector, I did rather well at Harvard."

"So did Mr. Stanford. Somebody said he was the great noise in Classics. I don't know what it means."

"Tony Stanford was my great pal. We neither of us had a great deal of money. We both banked on our brains. They do count, Inspector. Even a man like Macmillan, an uneducated genius, knew that he could not go the whole way with stupid illiterates. He took Tony into partnership, and Tony introduced me to him."

"I quite understand Mr. Stanford's position. It is yours that I have heard called in question. You were a secret agent . . .?"

"I was not quite a detective, which I am sure, Inspector, must be an honourable calling. In Paris I was doing for Mr. Macmillan, what all the Embassies were doing for their own Governments, and perhaps the various trusts and companies controlled by Macmillan are of more consequence than the interests of some small nations."

"Perhaps, but the diplomats to whom you refer are properly accredited."

"Yes! and have many privileges denied to me."

"You bought men who betrayed their countries."

"Betrayal is a strong word. Not altogether just, but let that pass. I never paid money—I own they sometimes obtained money's worth. By the way, Inspector, have you ever paid money to an informer?"

"Sometimes! But I don't think, Mr. Bolton, we must waste time over discussing a question of

morals. You were telling me how you became agent in Europe for Mr. Macmillan. Do you still hold that position?"

"No! I don't. Some months ago I happened to take up a cause which conflicted with Mr. Macmillan's policy, and I at once resigned my position."

"That was when you became engaged to Princess Propotkin?"

"If you don't mind, I think we will leave the lady's name out of the discussion."

"You became interested in Russian exiles and so could no longer keep Mr. Macmillan informed of their projects."

"Yes!"

"So you quarrelled."

"I have no quarrel with Mr. Macmillan. Thanks to him I have had a very large salary for years, and thanks to him and information supplied by him I have made a large fortune upon the Bourse. I am now a rich man, even if you judge riches by an American standard, and I owe all I have to Mr. Macmillan."

"But when you resigned through a change of views, he was angry."

"I don't know. Tony was; and called me every sort of fool. But I don't know much about Mr. Macmillan personally. He is the Bugaboo whom Tony keeps in the background."

"I suppose it was from Mr. Stanford that you

heard how Max Wiel had absconded with compromising papers."

"Yes! and that Mr. Macmillan would give £5,000 for their return. I should have been pleased, if I could have got them, to have returned them to him as a peace offering."

"I think, sir, Mr. Stanford has now returned them on your behalf."

"Oh, you know that do you? Is there anything hid from you?"

"Yes, several things, but I know also that there were two papers in which your activities were mentioned, and they have not been returned."

Mr. Bolton flushed as he said: "I don't expect you to believe me, Inspector, but the papers you mention have not come into my possession."

"I do believe you, sir, for the papers in question happen to be in my pocket."

"In your pocket! where the devil did you find them?"

"On your valet, Brown. He had abstracted them from the black bag, which is still under your bed, before he handed over to you that compromising possession."

"But why?"

"Well, he thought, I expect, that if the black bag did not lead to your being hanged, he might still blackmail you with the letters."

"I hear you have caught Brown?"

"Yes, he is under lock and key, and has made a statement which more or less incriminates you."

"The devil he has! Let's hear it."

"That's not necessary—I want to know how you engaged Brown."

"He was recommended to me by Mr. Stepanovich, who told me that he had been long in the service of a nobleman who had just died."

"He did not tell you that he was an ex-convict?"

"Good heavens, no!"

"Did Brown tell you?"

"Brown never told me anything. Brown to me was almost an automaton. He had the face of a sphinx and the efficiency of a machine. He was the perfect servant—you pressed the bell and he was there. You said what you wanted and it was done. Yes, sir, and no, sir, were the limits of his conversational powers."

"You had no idea that Brown was a spy on your movements, and that your letters from Paris, especially from the lady we must not mention, were copied and transmitted to Mr. Stepanovich."

This time Mr. Bolton's face flushed a darker red, and he clenched his hands.

"You say that you refused any longer to convey Russian information to Mr. Macmillan, but he

obtained all your information, none the less, through the two Stepanoviches."

"I'll murder them, if this is true."

"No, you won't, sir, for I have them both under my charge."

"Have you any more revelations to make or questions to ask?" Mr. Bolton's voice was no longer smooth or clear. He was husky with wrath.

"Yes, you knew Wiel?"

"Of course I did. I warned Tony more than once against him, but there was no convincing Macmillan. Even he has his blind spot. He saw the man was clever. He was a Pole or some sort of dago and spoke several languages. Macmillan can't understand the difference between a cad and a gentleman. He thinks a man who can speak badly in five languages is an educated man."

"What have been your dealings with Wiel?"

"He offered me, through an intermediary, the letters in which I was mentioned and I refused to treat for them. It may interest you to know that when I resigned my position with Macmillan I told the lady you mentioned all about my past. I was in honour bound to do that. You will understand."

"Yes!"

"Well, Wiel followed me to London, and I

received a letter from him here, threatening to expose me at once to Festonen and Stepanovich. He apparently did not know that the old man was a traitor. I replied that I would not treat for the letters concerning myself alone, but I would give a large sum for all the papers he had stolen. I sent this letter by Brown to an address in the City. Next I had a letter agreeing to my terms and suggesting a meeting at a Night Club in the City. Again I sent Brown to represent me with a letter containing a cheque on Paris which might be stopped before it was cashed if Wiel played me false. I did not really think that Wiel would accept it, but Brown returned with the black bag."

"What did he tell you?"

"Nothing! I've told you that Brown never said anything to me. I said to him, 'Take this letter to the address on it. Be at the place at ten o'clock and bring back what the man gives you.' Brown said 'Yes, sir.' I was not, myself, in from the Berkeley until half past twelve, and there was Brown, quite impassive, with the back bag. He handed it to me without remark. I said 'Thank you'."

"Then why did you go to Bolter's Court next day at so early an hour?"

"Well, I went through the papers, and found that the two which referred to myself were missing. I found also this letter from Mr. Festonen."

Mr. Bolton produced from his pocket the following:

> Sir,
>
> I shall be at my office, 8 Bolter's Court at 11 p.m. on Monday, and am prepared to pay the price you name for the papers, if you will come with me to Paris on Tuesday, and give explanations to the Committee there.
>
> Yours faithfully,
>
> F. FESTONEN.

"That letter alarmed me. It is true that the Princess Propotkin had heard my full confession, and that the Grand Duke and others were roughly acquainted with the facts, but I was naturally unwilling to have matters discussed in a large committee and have questions asked about Macmillan which I could not honourably answer. I knew when the committee met, and that Festonen would have to leave by the eight o'clock train if he meant to be present, so I got up very early in the hope that I might see him before he started and be able to reassure him about my honesty. I was so worried and anxious that I could not sleep, with the consequence that I was up and dressed more than an hour before I need have been. I walked to Bolter's Court and you know what I found there. Max Wiel had never reached Festonen, and the papers were not in his wallet. That's all I know."

"You never knew the younger Stepanovich?"

"No!"

"I have only one more question to ask. What do you know about the Borgian dagger?"

"I collect medieval weapons and armour and was quite prepared to pay a long price for a dagger of the Quatrocento which Sanders, who wished to sell it, would guarantee, and which Stepanovich thought to be undoubtedly genuine. You could not find better experts. Of course I did not believe the Borgian legend. Historic relics of that sort need a very certain pedigree."

"You know now that the dagger was stolen and was found in the body of Max Wiel. You don't know, I expect, that old Stepanovich believes you had the dagger and has been worrying because he has not received your cheque."

"I never had it."

"Yes, Stepanovich sent you the dagger and his son asserts that he gave it to Brown for you. Do you see the case against you? The man was murdered with the dagger, the murdered man's black bag was found in your possession, and the papers it contained you have just handed over to Mr. Stanford."

"Good Lord!"

"A pretty good case, only Brown can prove that it was impossible for him to have received the dagger, and you can I imagine prove that you

were at the Berkeley when the murder was committed."

"Who then did it?"

"Alexander Stepanovich, the Communist, who was also Macmillan's spy."

"I can't believe what you suggest about Mr. Macmillan."

"I daresay not. You told me half an hour ago that Mr. Macmillan could not get the whole way without gentlemen, like you and Mr. Stanford. I expect that's true. I expect also he knows that it takes all sorts to make a world. He is out to make a new world. It will be a hell of a world—and he can't get the whole way without the Wiels and Stepanoviches. You have seen the papers, so you know that he was plotting against England, a friendly Power."

"I knew he was not an Anglophile. That did not trouble me. I am an American citizen with a domicile in France. But you are mistaken if you think I have read all the papers. I have read those that are in French and German, but most are in Russian of which I know very little. In the papers I read I saw nothing to justify your strong expressions."

"No—you young men, thinking yourselves very clever, have been run in blinkers. You have taken your Triple Mac where he wanted to go, and you have got there, but you have not seen the country, through which you passed, or you would have shied.

I've opened your eyes a bit, and I've not been hard on you."

"Thank you, Inspector, but I feel at the moment that I know all about what they call the third degree."

CHAPTER IX

It was nearly half past eight when I returned to my room, and found Billy waiting for me. I have not yet described my room, but the reader should have some idea of it—the stage on which was to take place the interview between Inspector Frost and the master of millions.

It was a room of some size with a threadbare Turkey carpet. It had no window, and the skylight had not recently been washed. The upper part of the door was filled with ground glass in the hope of giving light to a dark passage. These details do not really matter as the time had come for turning on the electric switches, and two unshaded bulbs shed a cold light. I do not decorate my walls to any extent, but I have one illustrated calendar which was given me two years and more ago as a Christmas present by my daughter. It is no longer very useful but its radiant colour accentuates the bare and business-like severity of my apartment. For furniture there is an immense cupboard, which conceals a safe, there is a kneehole writing table on which is a telephone receiver, an electric bell, some stationery and writing materials,

and behind the table is a revolving chair in which I sit watching the door. Alongside of it is a smaller table which usually contains books of reference. These we put into the cupboard, for Billy was to sit beside me with folded arms and look good. There were two other rather small chairs with cane bottoms, one we placed by the wall and the other for Mr. Macmillan some six feet in front of the writing table. There is no way of seating a man more at a disadvantage than six feet in front of a man at a desk. The man at the desk can see the other man's boots. I had forgotten a row of pegs on the wall with the hats of Billy and myself and an old Burberry which somebody left behind.

I write all this because Billy and I were just a little nervous—a man of millions daunts the best of us. Was the Triple Mac going to down us or what the dickens was he coming for? He had rushed from Milwaukee to see Inspector Frost, and asked to see him on the night of his arrival. It was unfortunate, too, that he should have dined. Billy had dined also. I had been so long with Mr. Bolton that I was dinnerless.

At last the clock struck the half hour and scarcely a minute later Mr. Mckinley M. Macmillan was ushered in, and he was followed by a man much fatter than myself.

"Inspector Frost, that's right—my friend, Mr. Jefferson Jones."

Mr. Jefferson Jones said it was a pleasure to meet me, but his eyes were fixed on the skylight. The two men sat down, Mr. Macmillan in front of me and Mr. Jefferson Jones by the back wall, and I looked at them.

Mr. Macmillan appeared to be the hundred per cent. American of fiction and the films. He had a soft brown hat which he put on his knees, and brown shoes with fortified toecaps. He had a square head, the neck of a bull, and a powerful jaw. He was clumsy in his movements, but you felt his power. He was a bully.

Mr. Jefferson Jones had slightly tilted his chair on sitting down, which was rash considering the chair and his weight, and his head rested against the wall. He had a very short, turned-up nose, a very wide mouth, a double chin, and he still seemed only to be interested in the skylight.

"Who's the young fellow," asked Mr. Macmillan.

"Detective Smith, who has been assisting me in——"

"I don't care what he has been doing. He's not wanted here. He can go."

"Excuse me, sir. I may want him. Besides, you have brought a witness."

"A legal adviser," said Mr. Jefferson Jones to the skylight.

"You don't expect me to discuss my business before boys."

"Perhaps you would prefer to put your business in writing and if so——" I half rose to wish Mr. Macmillan good evening, when Mr. Jefferson Jones intervened.

"It's his pitch, Mac, and don't you forget it. You are not now in God's own country, and people over here haven't yet learnt to think of you as God Almighty in trousers. You must go slow with them till they size you up."

"Where I come from," said Mr. Macmillan, "we do business and don't palaver."

"I am waiting to hear your business, what is it?"

"You know what I've come about. Your damned newspapers killed me. I might have lost a lot of money. Whose fault was that?"

"The newspapers, sir. We were careful to circularise them that the only clue to the murdered man's identity were visiting cards inscribed Mckinley M. Macmillan."

"Anyhow, somebody made a muddle. I expect the newspapers would say it was you, eh?"

"Of course they would," said I.

"Well now, you know it wasn't me, what have you been doing?"

"We have made some progress in our inquiries."

"Not much hustle in this old country."

"We prefer to act with deliberation."

"Oh, you do! Well, have you discovered a single darned thing, that's what I want to know."

"Yes! we know the man was Max Wiel, that he had been your confidential clerk, and that he absconded with 20,000 dollars."

"You're right there. As I was in Milwaukee and not here, I don't mind confessing I should like to have had the murdering of him. I bet the American police put you wise on who he was."

"We also have reason to suppose, what the American police do not seem to have discovered, that Max Wiel took away with him a great many highly confidential papers."

"They've found out that! Do you hear Jefferson? You bet me they wouldn't. But I don't leave things to chance—not much—so I came across the ocean just to see what you were up to, and take a hand."

"Scotland Yard will be glad of your assistance."

"Scotland Yard! You mean you'll be glad. All contributions thankfully received, eh, Inpector?—thought you would tumble to it. You get me?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Gosh, man, don't you see this affair concerns me, concerns my business? Now I guess you know why I've come all the way from Milwaukee to have a sight of you. I guess, too, that

you want to kick yourself for keeping that fellow in the room. He's one too many for our little picnic party."

"Detective Smith is entirely in my confidence."

"I don't care a damn about that. I am not going to square both of you. I've figured it out, I know what you're worth, and I offer 5,000 dollars down and you must settle shares with the fellow. Gosh, Jefferson, he don't even look interested!"

"And what do you expect us to do for 5,000 dollars?"

"Nothing, man! It's easy money. You've got to drop the case, that's all."

"I am afraid my Chief would not consent to that."

"Then muddle it. You'll find that comes natural to you. See, man, it's like this: Wiel got it in the neck and it served him right. Some poor devil did him in. Why? and who he was? who cares? At your time of life you won't get promotion even if he is hanged. You do nothing—that's all! You take me?"

"Why should you wish to protect the murderer?"

"I don't! I don't care a tinker's cuss about the murderer but I'm not going to have you or anyone else monkeying my business. There's no knowing what fool thing police might do. They might advertise for the missing papers. You don't sup-

pose I want all the world to know that I've lost them."

"But you do want to recover them?"

"That's my concern. Papers may be recovered apart from detectives—I am making a firm offer. The dollars are in my pocket. I don't mind paying, but I won't have any meddling. Do you understand that? Where I am, my word goes."

"You don't seem to understand, Mr. Macmillan, that the Yard has a reputation to maintain. There is, what the Papers call, the Honour of the Force."

"You can't raise me! I'll not pay a red cent more for your honour. You can put *that* in your pipe and smoke it. This is a business proposition. We are not at an Aunt Selina's tea-party talking pious platitudes about social uplift. We are sitting on damned uncomfortable chairs. Money talks and you are some fool if you don't listen."

"Wait a minute, Mac," said Mr. Jefferson Jones regarding the skylight, "I am afraid that you are giving Inspector Frost an utterly wrong impression. You, Mac, are a cute business man, but you are insensitive to the moral and mental atmosphere of a country that's still learning from Moses."

"You got a hunch on Aunt Selina? What the devil are you driving at?"

"I fear our good friend, Inspector Frost, who has

never been in Milwaukee, has got it into his head that you have come here to offer him a bribe to break all the ten commandments. Of course, you have done nothing of the kind, or you wouldn't have brought a State Attorney along with you."

"I talk straight. People generally know what's what, when I'm telling them. But you tell him what I mean if he can't understand."

"Well, Inspector Frost, my friend Macmillan has been robbed. He has lost papers which belonged to him, private papers which no one has a right to see but himself. All business men must have such papers. That is why they have safes. Now, having lost them, my friend Macmillan is naturally afraid lest you, with the best intentions in the world, by publishing his loss might do him and the shareholders, to whom he is responsible, a great—I might almost say —an irreparable wrong. Of course, you would not wish to do that. My friend has surely suffered enough already through the dishonesty of his clerk. It isn't fair that he should suffer much more through misdirected efforts of the police. No good can come to anyone, but a great deal of harm to thousands of innocent people. I am interested in the matter myself for I am a shareholder in several of Mac's concerns. I am sure when you think the matter over you will do

the right thing, and if your conscience doesn't admit of your accepting Mr. Macmillan's little present, why Mr. Macmillan will be richer by 5,000 dollars.

"You don't understand us Americans over here. We are a generous people and free with our money. When we see a man doing the right thing we want to reward him, and in America —we are a simple people—we are not so suspicious as you are, nor perhaps so proud. We don't think ourselves insulted on being offered a gift."

"If you like Mr. Jefferson Jones, I will call up the Chief—he is in the building, and put your case before him."

"You'll damned well do nothing of the sort," said Macmillan. "First there's that young fellow, who has sat there as if he were an image to be shot by the photographer, and now there's your Chief. This matter has got to be settled, and settled at once, between you and me. You and Jeff here can talk about the morals afterwards. I am about fed up."

"You know now," said Mr. Jefferson Jones, "how very unlikely it is that you will make further discoveries. A murderer who get's a week's start is not often caught. Your discoveries are at an end."

"All he's discovered," said Macmillan, "he got from the American police. He's not likely by him-

self to discover anything that will be worth a Pressman's tip."

"Now, Mac, don't be rude. I think you will permit my telling the Inspector that we have almost certain intelligence that the papers have been destroyed. All that Mr. Macmillan now desires is to avoid publicity."

"I see," said I. "Now if you'll excuse me I'll put through a telephone call—Frost speaking—Is that Westley? Any success? Thanks so much—Then I'll tell."

Macmillan glared at me while I put up the receiver.

"Did I or did I not tell you I would not have others brought into the matter. Come along, Jeff there's no doing business with a man like this. His very 'phone is of an out-of-date pattern. No wonder this old country is going down. You've lost 5,000 dollars."

"One minute, Mr. Macmillan, I want to tell you that I know who committed the murder, and I also know where your papers are."

Mr. Macmillan had risen, but he stopped.

"The murder was committed by Alexander Stepanovich, who was once in your employ. I have him under lock and key, and he will be charged with murder to-morrow morning. As for your papers they are quite safe. They are in this building."

"I know one of those statements is a damned lie. And what the devil do you insinuate by

saying that chap, whoever he is, was in my employ?"

"I keep myself to facts. I saw Mr. Stanford carrying a portfolio this evening out of Claridge's Hotel. One of my men followed him to the Lammermoor Hotel. I told Inspector Westley, on the political side, who happens to be interested in your correspondence. Your room was searched under a warrant directly after you left it, and he has just told me over the out-of-date 'phone that he has been successful."

Macmillan was standing facing me, the veins at his brows were swelling. I have rarely looked on such terrible wrath.

"You hound!" he cried. "And you thought you could play with me——"

"Hand's up! Mr. Macmillan." It was Billy who shouted. His words sounded sharp and clear. His was a new voice and unexpected.

Mr. Macmillan's hand came away from his hip pocket. He turned a dazed look on the smiling Billy who also had empty hands. The door opened and two stalwart constables appeared framed in the doorway. Mr. Jefferson Jones saw them, and, tilting his chair too far back, came with a crash to the ground. It broke the tension.

Stumbling to his feet, he said: "It's time for us to clear. They've called our bluff. Come

along, Mac. That's some boy of Frost's. He saved you from being hanged next month. And Frost from being a bloody corpse on the carpet."

The rest is a matter of history. The trial and condemnation of Stepanovich may be read in the files of the *Daily Intelligence.* Stepanovich suffered for his crime—but they were his virtues which sealed his fate. After his trial it was manifest that he was really devoted to his father, and sincere in working for the Communist cause. He did not kill Wiel because that rascal had cheated him, but because he was determined that the Macmillan papers should not get into Festonen's hands. He did not know that Wiel only intended to sell Festonen the documents which might ruin Bolton. That was the irony of it. Stepanovich hated Bolton, and had instructions from Macmillan to spy on him, and look out for some means of discrediting him among the friends for whom he had sacrificed his post.

In a drawer in the flat in Zenobia Square, we found a holograph letter from Macmillan about the recovery of his papers, and there was a sinister phrase suggesting that such a man as Wiel might very well incur the wrath of an Apache. Wiel was then in Paris. This letter brought Macmillan into court, and he was kept

in the witness box three days, while Sir Thomas Parsons, K.C., subjected him to a merciless examination. Sir Thomas Parsons increased his already great and lucrative reputation by the case. In fact, he got all the credit. The Chief said to me: "You made some mistakes, Frost, but on the whole you did not do badly."

Billy has been promoted sergeant. He deserved it for he saved my life. As his godfather, however, I am interested in his soul's welfare, and I am aware that he wants snubbing. As his godfather I resolve to snub him every night when I go to bed, and then in the morning he refuses to take my snubbing seriously. I suppose I shall have to hand him over to Westley, who wants him; but my only son was killed in the war, and Billy has to some extent taken his place. Mrs. Frost sometimes tells me that I think more of him than of my own flesh and blood, which is absurd. I still cherish a hope that Billy will marry my youngest daughter.

Talking of Mrs. Frost reminds me that she read to me at breakfast this morning the following snippet from the *Lady's Mirror*:

> Mr. Edward van Storck is once more at Cowes in his beautiful yacht—*The Sea Bird*. He is entertaining among others, the Duchess of Bedminster, the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Brieux, Mr. Sefton Hall, of

the American Embassy, Mrs. Willie Sandford, Mr. Bolton and his lovely bride, *née* Princess Propotkin.

In Mr. van Storck's yacht Mr. Bolton knows, without doubt, what it is to be on the crest of the wave.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY PURNELL AND SONS
PAULTON (SOMERSET) AND LONDON